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"HANG ON TO HIM!" SHOUTED OLD FALCON, SCRAMBLING INTO THE ROOM. "ONE MINUTE MORE, BRAVE THERESE."

OR, THE FATEFUL LEGACY.

The Romance of a Celebrated Case.

BY JACKSON KNOX,
(OLD HAWK,)

AUTHOR OF "HAWK HERON, THE FALCON DETECTIVE," "OLD GRIP," "CAPTAIN CLEW," "SPRINGSTEEL STEVE," ETC.

CHAPTER I. THE SECRET.

"DON'T shoot, mister—please don't! I'm an escaped prison-bird, I confess it, but I mean you no violence. Only a suit of clothes—any old rags to hide these accursed stripes, for God's sake! Only that, for a secret that will make you rich!"

These extraordinary words were hurriedly, breathlessly uttered by a wild-eyed, haggard and powerfully-built man, in the Sing Sing prison-garb, who had suddenly put in an appearance, by the window at break of day, in a small boarding-house room on the banks of the Hudson at Tarrytown, after stealthily climbing up from the adjoining garden.

He was confronted by a singularly handsome young man, freshly dressed as if for an early morning stroll, who had precipitately retreated to the furthest extremity of the room, where he stood, pallid and startled, with a small pistol in his trembling hand.

The unwelcome intruder had closed his lips tightly, as if half regretting the proposition he had made, but as the young man's distrust seemed in no wise to diminish, the wild desire for assured security from his pursuers at any cost was again paramount, and the fugitive continued to urge his entreaties with increased desperation.

"Don't give me away, mister; for God's sake don't!" he went on. "Any sort of old duds—it's all I ask, and the golden secret is yours!"

A look of interest, if not of positive greed, in the other's face caused him to hurry on, with yet more eagerness.

"No wonder you hesitate to believe me, sir, but I swear it's the truth! A pencil and a scrap of paper, and the secret is your own exclusively. We buried it a twelvemonth back, just before being laid by the heels and railroaded for other crimes. No one can share it with you. Grayton is doing a lifer at Trenton, while Brummagem Bob I left in the prison hospital, whence he can never come out alive. Quick; say the word! The guards may be on my trail even now. I must get away from this, and out of the country, or I'm a goner. My secret for some cast-off clothes! Quick! is it a go?"

The astonished young man, whose name was Harvey Mayfield, had by this time somewhat recovered from his trepidation, though he was still very pale.

His resolution was taken.

Pointing to a small writing-table, on which there were writing materials, he at the same time opened a wardrobe door, to the revelation of numerous articles of clothing hanging from hooks.

The actions were significant.

The hunted man's eyes sparkled at sight of the spare garments—which would have fitted him fairly, as the men were of about the same height and build—and he was on the point of making an eager spring toward them, when Mayfield, now thoroughly composed, brought him to a stand with the leveled weapon.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" demanded the latter, with another gesture toward the writing materials. "The secret first, if you please."

"Oh, yes—to be sure!"

And, plumping himself down at the table, the convict began to write on a scrap of paper with great rapidity, considering the scrawling fist he made of it, Mayfield in the mean time overlooking the performance with a hawk-like greediness of expression that seemed new to his handsome and intelligent features.

The scrawl completed, Mayfield quickly slipped it into his pocket, while the other, springing with no further interruption to the wardrobe, gathered in an armful of the coveted garments at a single swoop.

But at this instant there was a sudden trampling of many feet, accompanied by hoarse voices, in the garden outside.

The escaped convict dropped his acquisition, and reeled back into the center of the room, his brutal face white and set, but with the despairing ferocity of a hunted wild beast at bay.

There was no mistaking the fresh interruption. It was the hue and cry, the closing-in of the fell pursuit that death-knelled his fleeing hopes.

He glared wildly about him. Then, after a movement toward the door, he clinched his teeth, his eyes blazed from under their beetle-brows, and all the tiger in his evil nature was to the surface.

"Too late! cornered at last!" he snarled. "Well, to the death then, sooner than back to the cells, and the infernal punishment awaiting me there!"

He snatched a saber from a circle of military trophies that ornamented one of the walls, and, as the shouts and hubbub round-about the house increased, he leaped out of the window, with a sort of defiance roar.

Harvey Mayfield quietly remained in his room, pale and composed, while the sounds of a desperate contest going on in the garden came up to him, and, indeed, speedily aroused the entire household.

Then came two ringing shots, and the inmates of the house made their appearance upon the scene by the halls, staircase and front door, most of them not wholly dressed.

Out they rushed to behold the escaped convict motionless on his back, his sword-arm smashed by a bullet at the elbow, the life-blood welling up from a far more terrible wound in the chest, from which his prison-garb was already saturated.

Sternly contemplating the prostrate form from a short distance, stood an authoritative-looking man, with a revolver, still smoking, in his o'erred grasp. Near at hand, and staunching their wounds as best they might, were two men, likewise prison officials, it would seem, who had been severely slashed with the saber in the desperado's hand, one with a deep cut on the cheek,

the other across the thigh. A little apart from the trio, stood an unassuming, keen-eyed man, interestedly observing the tragic scene, of which it was somehow evident that he had been a non-participating witness, and who likewise, somehow, afforded the impression that he was a detective. A considerable crowd by this time had gathered about the dramatic group thus individualized.

"Is he dead, quite dead, think you?"

The words, half-horrified, half-eager, were Harvey Mayfield's, who was leaning forward, with his eyes fastened so searching upon the ghastly, upturned face as to seem heedless or unconscious of his surroundings.

"Dead? Yes, dead as a smoked herring, or there's no virtue in the bullet that's in his desperate heart," replied the authoritative man. "It's all up with Jem Burkitt, that was Prisoner No. 94, and I call every one here to witness that he forced us to proceed to extremities, and brought his blood on his own head. Am I not right?" and he turned somewhat appealingly to the unassuming, keen eyed man.

The latter's attention had been attracted to young Mayfield, from whom he did not withdraw his gaze as he answered:

"You only did your duty, Van Wart; there can be no doubt as to that."

"Well, I should say so," continued the other. "Why, the scoundrel's sword-point was at my throat before I broke his arm with the first shot, and, as he tried to change his hilt-grip, I gave him his quietus."

"True enough, too," put in one of the wounded guards, both of whom had by this time succeeded in bandaging their hurts, "for both Judkins and I had thought ourselves about done for, so sudden and murderous was the fellow's attack. By the way, whose room-window up yonder did he jump out of? and how could he have got hold of that toasting-fork, I wonder?"

Mayfield stepped forward, and made the necessary explanations, though without making any allusion to the convict's secret or the scrap of writing.

His story was not questioned.

"That's always the first idea of a runaway," said Keeper Van Wart, nodding—"to exchange their stripes for any sort of every-day duds at any and all hazards. How long was he in your room, sir, before he took the alarm?"

"Not more than half a minute, I should say," replied the young man, who had prudently left his pistol behind him. "I own to have been fairly startled out of my senses at first by the fellow's appearance. I had retreated into a corner, and he was helping himself to the contents of my wardrobe closet, when your hue and cry interrupted him."

A little later, when the keepers had carried the body of their victim away, Harvey Mayfield was about re-entering his boarding house, after a nerve-bracing stroll up the village street, when a touch was laid on his arm.

He turned to find himself confronted by the unassuming, keen-eyed man already alluded to.

"I respectfully request, sir," said the latter, quietly, "a few words with you, in your room."

"Certainly," was the surprised, but not discomposed reply. "Whom have I the honor of addressing, sir?"

The answer was evidently unexpected. It was this:

"I am Major Jack Falconbridge, otherwise Old Falcon, the detective, at your service, sir."

CHAPTER II.

MAJOR JACK, ALIAS OLD FALCON.

MAYFIELD had involuntarily started at the unlooked-for response.

"Old Falcon!" he repeated, in a somewhat awed tone; "Old Falcon, variously known as the Meteor Detective, Hounder Jack, Streak-o'-Light Maje, and the Thunderbolt."

An assenting but half-deprecating smile was the self-introduced detective's answer.

"Come in with me, since you wish it, major," continued the young man, thoroughly self-composed again. "Naturally enough, you may want to question me more fully as to this morning's strange tragedy, though there is really little more to tell."

As the detective took a proffered seat in Mayfield's room, and threw a comprehensive glance around him, he said:

"That I am professionally interested, Mr. Mayfield, in that dead convict's past career you will presently understand. Do you mind my questioning you, perhaps a little sharply?"

"Not a bit of it," returned Mayfield, coldly. "I have nothing to conceal."

"You are fortunate, for there are few men who can truthfully assert as much. This is your first return to your room since the tragedy, I presume?"

"It is. I was greatly upset, and needed the stroll I have just taken to compose myself."

"Naturally. Your explanation to the prison officials of your brief preliminary encounter with the fugitive convict was doubtless substantially correct."

"It was."

"I mean, you would not wish to alter or revise it, upon conscientious reflection?"

"In no particular that I can think of."

"And the fellow was here not more than half a minute?"

"I should say not, but perhaps for a minute; not more than that."

"And he at once grabbed the sword from among yonder trophies, terrorizing you completely, in his demand for clothing?"

"Yes; I am ashamed to own it."

"But, besides being taken by surprise, you were wholly defenseless?"

"Of course."

"Whose revolver is this?" And Old Falcon pointed to the weapon on the dressing-case, where its owner had hastily thrust it partly out of sight on rushing out into the garden.

Mayfield saw that he must be yet more wary in his replies to this inquisitor, but he had himself well in hand.

"It is mine, if you think it important to know," he replied, steadily.

"One wouldn't imagine you to be so easily terrorized, even by a desperate convict, with that little barker in your hand."

"How do you know it was in my hand?"

"I don't know that exactly," replied the detective, who had rested his touch lightly upon the revolver butt, as if feeling of its pulse. "But I do know that some hand has grasped it within the past hour—within the time of the convict's appearance here in this room. I am not deceived. The lingering warmth of that grasp is still upon it."

"You are a shrewd man, Mr. Detective," commented the young man, with not altogether mock admiration.

"Thanks; but am I not right?"

"Perfectly. Make yourself easy; the pistol was in my hand when the convict confronted me with the saber. But it didn't seem to startle him a cent's worth."

And Mayfield quietly took the cylinder out of the revolver, to show that it was not loaded.

"You see," he remarked, sarcastically, "even a desperate escaped criminal might fail to be seriously impressed by a revolver, that had been perhaps snapped ineffectually in his face several times."

The detective laughed.

"You are one ahead of me," said he, good-humoredly. "But, I think I can even up. Your time-estimates, for instance, are sadly out of the way."

"How so?"

"Since the fellow must have been with you here nearer ten minutes than to the best of your recollection."

"The deuce he was!"

"To be sure; for I saw him enter by the window, from my position at the garden-front, and sent back notice to that effect, by a passing village urchin, to the prison men, who had just turned up another road. I also timed the fellow's stay—just eight minutes, to a dot."

Young Mayfield nearly lost countenance, though not quite, notwithstanding that the dead man's written secret seemed to grow heavy in the inner waistcoat-pocket in which it was concealed.

"Of course, I must stand corrected," said he, with assumed carelessness. "I shouldn't have thought the man was here so long. But then the circumstances were embarrassing."

"Of course, of course!" easily. "Still—are you quite sure that he snatched the saber from the wall instantly upon entering?"

"I should say so!"

"Even before he made any parley?"

"Yes."

"Or seated himself at your writing-table yonder?"

"At my writing-table—he?"

"Yes; for, from my position outside, I could notice his bended attitude as he probably scribbled away, as with the laboriousness natural to an ignorant and illiterate man."

"You're all out."

"No, I'm not, young man! Your visitor's parley with you lasted, we will say, three minutes; his pen-and-ink performance would consume, say, four minutes more; which would leave just one more for him to start for that wardrobe, for instance, to appropriate an armful of the stipulated garments, before staggering back in despair, and snatching the sword with which to confront his pursuers in the garden."

Mayfield could not answer at once, though, by an effort, he managed to retain his outward composure.

The accuracy of the detective's acumen and deductions seemed little short of preternatural. And, moreover, he began to grow uncomfortable under those falcon eyes, whose peculiarity might have well earned for him his sobriquet of Old Falcon. Stranger, fiercer, more paralyzing eyes had surely never before looked out of a human head. They were no less magnetic than terrific. They seemed not only to penetrate into the young man's soul, but to clutch and drag at his golden secret, as might the wild hawk at the heart of its furred or feathered victim, with gloating gaze and insatiable talons, in its eyried nest. And the oddest feature of their peculiarity was that their fierceness and penetration did not change in the least even when

their owner laughed, or when his lips were mobile with smiling good humor.

"I say, young man," continued the detective after a pause, "do you mind telling me your profession, or business?"

Harvey Mayfield drew a breath of relief at this variation of the subject.

"I have neither the one nor the other at present, major," he replied—slowly, so as to thoroughly regain his presence of mind. "I was a bookkeeper in my uncle's bank in New York till recently. Then I," he colored slightly, but went on bravely, "I experienced religion, as they say. I am now up here, on the advice of my minister, trying to prepare my mind for entering upon the course of a student of divinity. Whether I shall succeed or not I do not know, but I hope to."

There was an unassuming frankness and modesty in the avowal that impressed the detective favorably, but he only smiled a little banteringly.

"Well, now," he laughed, "don't you think, Mr. Mayfield, as a prospective divinity student—perhaps, even as a future Boanerges—that I have succeeded in sort of knotting you up?"

But Harvey Mayfield's shrewd worldliness was once more to the fore.

"I think nothing of the sort," he replied, coldly. "Or, at least, your victory is more apparent than real. By the way, how have you come by my name?"

"Have you forgotten that you mentioned it to Keeper Van Wart, in making your off-hand, but scarcely accurate, statement over the dead body of the man—who was past denying or correcting you? By the way, you made sure he was dead as a starter. Not half-bad, that!"

The other made a contemptuous gesture.

"I had forgotten mentioning my name to the keeper," he observed. "But my statement, as then made, was substantially correct, and I defy any proof to the contrary. Whatever you pretend to have witnessed to the contrary, Mr. Detective, assisted by your guess-work and inferential piecing together, may attest your professional shrewdness, but has no effect on me, either as a hoodwinking or pumping process." And he returned the falcon gaze with an imperturbable stolidity. "There goes the breakfast bell, and I shall have to ask you to excuse me."

"Not bad, for a divinity student!" thought Old Falcon, to himself. "He is no ordinary man's fool though he may yet be mine." Then he said aloud:

"You even deny that the convict sat down and wrote at yonder desk?"

"Of course, I do!" and the other rose with an unmistakable air. "Preposterous! I doubt if the poor devil had been able to write so much as his own name."

"He could do more than that, and you know it."

"Sir, you are insolent!"

"I don't mean to be that, young man."

"What could the fellow have possibly written there, and under those exceptional circumstances?"

"A secret, in exchange for the promised clothing, of which he was in such desperate need!"

And a flash of extra-searching power shot from the eagle eyes, though Mayfield managed to maintain his imperturbability.

"This is too absurd! Excuse me, but my breakfast is getting cold."

The detective nonchalantly arose.

"So is mine, doubtless," said he. "And as I am something of a stranger here in Tarrytown, suppose you introduce me to your landlady as a transient breakfaster. This isn't mere cheek, or impudence," he added, in another tone. "Afterward I shall be glad to tell you of my concern in Jem Burkitt's past career, and you may find the story interesting."

The young man shrugged his shoulders assentingly, and led the way down to the dining-room.

CHAPTER III.

A CUP OF CAFE NOIR.

It was a fashionable summer boarding-house that Mr. Harvey Mayfield had selected for his meditations preparatory to a possible theological course of study, and, as the season was well advanced, the boarders of both sexes were already numerous.

Naturally enough, the tragic sensation of the morning was the ruling topic of conversation at the breakfast table, to the exclusion of almost everything else. But both Mayfield, and his companion, who had been assigned to a seat directly opposite the others, sedulously abstained from participating therein.

This seemed less strange on the part of the former, who had earned a reputation for somewhat eccentric taciturnity among his fellow-boarders.

But the uncommunicativeness of the detective, who had at once been recognized, and perhaps his profession guessed at by several who had been present at the recent tragedy, was less understood, and perhaps secretly resented; though it had to be confessed that the air of reserve existing between the two men themselves—the regular boarder

and the newly-introduced transient—was even more tantalizingly mysterious than what seemed a preconcerted inconvivialness upon the sensation of the hour, upon which both might be inferred to know so much.

"*Maman, mais c'est étonnant!*" at last commented a childish voice, with refreshing audibility, in the prettiest of French, that was, moreover, indubitably to the manner born. "*Voilà le beau monsieur*, from whose room-window the *forçat fugitif* jumped to his death, and yet he will not open his lips."

The speaker was a pretty, but forward, little girl, seated next the detective, at the side of a black-eyed, beautiful and superbly proportioned lady, presumably her mother, whose scarcely disguised regard had been more than once attracted toward the handsome young man opposite; who, however, had never seen either of them before, it being evident that they were recent arrivals.

"Hush, Mignon! you must not be bold," chided the lady, softly; though with yet another impressive glance at the imperturbable Mayfield, for which more than one of the other male boarders could have cheerfully cut his throat, out of sheer envy. "*On parle ou l'on tais jusque à ce que nous voulons.*"—["We speak or we do not speak, just as it pleases us."]

Harvey Mayfield only broke silence to order a cup of *cafe noir* with cognac, as a settler for his breakfast, which he had disposed of with a very passable appetite, everything considered.

When the cognac and sugar lump were set to blazing in the spoon poised over the coffee-cup, he coolly produced the dead man's scrawl (whose significance he had already committed to memory,) and, with an enigmatical glance toward the detective, held it patiently in the blue-flickering flame until it was consumed.

Old Falcon, however, merely elevated his eyebrows, and, emptying leisurely his cup of *cafe au lait*, applied his napkin for a last time to his mustache with the contented, self-satisfied air of a man who had enjoyed a good breakfast, and was becomingly thankful for the same.

In rising, he threw a single piercing glance at the lady with the little girl, under which the former seemed a little uneasy, as Mayfield, more interested than previously in the lady's bold beauty, could not help remarking. And the pair quitted the table together, after the major had laid the price of his repast on the tea-tray before Mrs. Godlove, the buxom and prepossessing boarding-house mistress, with a gentlemanly compliment as to the excellence of the meal that brought a pleased smile into her face.

"Do you feel like walking?" asked the detective, when they were in the hall.

"Always after breakfast," replied Mayfield, taking his hat from the rack.

"Come with me, then. I think I can interest you."

"Don't forget luncheon to-day, Mr. Mayfield," a very soft and musical, one might almost say an affectionate, voice called after them as they were going out at the front entrance. "There'll be something you specially like—fresh trout and a chicken salad; and your friend, Major Falconbridge, would be welcome as your guest."

The words were Mrs. Godlove's, she having followed them from the table, and she stood on the piazza, smiling, as the young man turned, with a slight flush in his pale, thoughtful face, to make a courteous response.

The detective glanced at him a little quizzically as they proceeded on their stroll.

"Decidedly this young fellow is in luck!" said he to himself. "He is a pronounced blonde, while our landlady is as well preserved a blonde of fifteen years his senior as could be found in a day's jaunt. But then, the black-eyed rope-dancer, who ogled him so persistently across the table, is also a blonde, besides being nearer his own age. But the fellow isn't a bit of a coxcomb, and probably impresses them without intention, or even consciousness."

Mayfield, who had fallen into a meditative mood, suddenly roused himself to say abruptly:

"You looked at the lady next you at table as if you knew something of her, major. Who and what is she?"

"One who would doubtless make a stir among her fashionable fellow-boarders, did they but know her reputation and profession," was the reply.

The young man naturally looked up with renewed curiosity.

"Mlle. Therese Bertrande, otherwise *La Travadeuse*, the famous rope-dancer and mountebank at large."

"Oho! And the little girl?"

"Her child, Mignon, otherwise *La Santerelle*, or The Grasshopper. The pair of 'em, by the way, are strong on pseudonyms. *La Travadeuse* is The Whirlwind, or The Hurricane."

"Of course; but that mite of a child also a circus performer?"

"Yes; but don't make any mistake as to *La Santerelle*. Mite as she appears, she is twelve or thirteen, and snappy as a steel-trap."

"I merely questioned out of passing curiosity," returned the young man, coldly. "It can matter nothing to me."

"I don't know about that. The woman is an insatiable Circe, and you were devoured more

than once this morning by those magnificent black eyes of hers."

Mayfield colored almost angrily as he dismissed the subject with an impatient gesture, for which his companion was yet more prepossessed in his favor.

They had been strolling slowly up the superb village Broadway, with the noble country residences and grounds on either side, that, year by year, render Tarrytown more and more attractive for wealthy New Yorkers, and now turned off into the more distinctive river-road, where Old Falcon instituted a quickening of the pace.

"Whither are we bound?" inquired the embryo divinity student, starting out of another reverie.

"For the State Prison, of course," was the easy rejoinder.

Mayfield involuntarily stopped.

"It is only a five mile trudge," continued the detective, reassuringly. "And some time or another you would have to recover your saber, anyway."

"True." And Mayfield was thoughtfully keeping step with him again.

"A sort of heirloom, perhaps."

"It was my father's sword," said the youth, simply. "He died bravely torn to pieces by a shell, in the War for the Union, with the saber in his hand, at the head of his troop. An heirloom truly! My sainted mother bequeathed it to me, together with the other trophies you have seen—poor soul! it was about all that had been left to her—when she, too, died, leaving me alone in the world."

There was a refined mournfulness and simplicity in his tone.

"A pity if this young fellow and I should fall to odds," thought the detective. "In spite of his present temptation, he isn't half a bad fellow—not yet."

"Young man, I am beginning to like you," he went on.

"Thank you, sir," said Mayfield, gravely.

"My history is a simple and uneventful one. My mother's small income, together with her army pension, ceased with her life, but it had enabled her to give me a respectable business education. With my scant savings of the past five years I am now endeavoring to prepare myself for the course of which I hinted. Whether I shall continue in it or not I cannot say. Sometimes I have my doubts."

"Why?"

"I don't know—I can't express it," with his characteristic abruptness of gesture. "I want to be a good man—to be of some good to my fellows. That is all I can say."

"I'll tell you now how I chanced to be in at Jem Burkitt's death," said the detective, after a pause.

CHAPTER IV.

THE STORY OF THE STOLEN TREASURE.

I HAD gone to Sing Sing last night, you see," he went on, in his brusque, business-like way, "for the purpose of interviewing Ninety-four, in hopes of extracting some valuable information concerning a rather remarkable case of robbery and hidden treasure in which I am deeply engaged."

"But I was too late. It was my intention to apply at the prison the first thing this morning, before the convicts should be told off in their respective working gangs. My hotel was quite near the prison main entrance."

"Having retired early, I rose an hour before dawn, and was taking the air up the road when the alarm was sounded that a convict had broken away. I arrived at the prison in time to learn from the warden, an old acquaintance of mine, that it was my very man, Number Ninety-four, that had escaped, and to join in the pursuit."

"The rest you know. One of my best chances of following up my clew to the robbers' hidden plunder seemed to have slipped through my fingers with the death of the escaped convict. When I saw him lying before me, shot to death in the garden, I was filled with disappointment and chagrin—until I saw you."

"What had your seeing me to do with your disappointment, pray?" demanded Mayfield, coldly.

"Because it apprised me that my clew to the stolen treasure had been transmitted to you."

"Ah, I begin to understand," sarcastically.

"You would still connect me with the ruffian's past."

"The moment I marked your anxiety to know if the convict were really dead or not," continued Old Falcon, without heeding, "the complication was unvailed to me in a flash. On the threshold of his doom, Jem Burkitt had surrendered his secret to you in exchange for a disarming suit of your cast-off garments, which fate had not permitted him to appropriate. Young man, I am a pretty good judge of men's characters, motives, temptations and even actions."

With his lips still smiling, he turned that extraordinary gaze of his full upon Mayfield, who, however, merely shrugged his shoulders with renewed imperturbability.

"Yes," he went on. "And you had made

sure of the secret beforehand—even compelling the desperate man to commit it to writing."

"Indeed?"

"For a truth, my young friend. And I by no means despair of that secret, notwithstanding your clever bravado of burning it up before my eyes at the breakfast-table this morning."

Mayfield laughed.

"Even assuming all this to be true," said he, "what help would there be for you now?"

"You would not have destroyed such a scrap of writing, without having first committed it to memory."

"That would stand to reason."

"Very well. Should my other sources of information fail, you will sooner or later impart it to me."

"Oho! and why should I?"

"By reason of your conscientious words of a few moments ago: 'I want to be a good man'."

Mayfield elevated his handsome eyebrows, without making any reply.

"You spoke of other sources of information," he observed, after a pause.

"Besides yourself, there are two remaining, now that Jem Burkitt is no more."

"And those two?"

"Are those who were his pals in the robbery. They are Manning Grayton, *alias* the Centerbit, a master-scoundrel, now under a life sentence, for a subsequent murder, in the New Jersey State Prison; and Tip Barker, *alias* Brummagem Bob, now in the hospital at Sing Sing Prison. I am about to visit the latter, and you can be present, if you wish."

"Oh, I'll accompany you, then," Mayfield carelessly assented.

"However, I don't place much hope in either of these convicts," the detective went on. "Brummagem Bob is, I understand, at death's door, and would perhaps be incapable of speech, even if so inclined. And Grayton, being a lifer, would have nothing to gain in giving the snap away; his only hope being to effect an escape at some time or other, and enjoy the buried plunder."

"I see, I see!" a little warily, or at least unconcernedly.

"You haven't asked me for the history of the robbery."

"Is it interesting?"

"You shall judge for yourself. A little over a twelvemonth ago, old Mr. Hopkins Mervyn was a prosperous and somewhat miserly broker and private banker in New York. One morning he went to his bank to find his mammoth so-called burglar-proof safe in ruins, and gutted of its cash contents. The burglars had selected their opportunity with no less cleverness than they had executed their crime. By an unfortunate coincidence (unfortunate for the banker), the missing funds (over three hundred thousand dollars in gold and unidentifiable greenbacks) had constituted his entire capital, besides a few thousands belonging to a neighboring National Bank, which he had intended to hand in on that morning. Not only was old Mervyn ruined in his own person, but in debt for that side amount, beyond all likelihood of rehabilitation; for his health, never the best, gave way under the shock, and, moreover, as the robbers had left no traceable clew, there were even those unkind enough to hint at his possible collusion with the crime."

"He took to his home and his bed, and, in a few short months, was a corpse in the arms of his weeping daughter and sole heir-at-law—a beautiful and sensitive young lady, Miss Henriette Mervyn."

"Enough was allowed the young lady out of the sale of the house furniture to give her father's remains a decent burial, the rest being retained by the bank corporation in whose debt he had died."

"After the funeral she mysteriously disappeared, practically penniless, leaving no trace. In addition to her other misfortunes, she is known to have brooded over the unjust aspirations of her father's name. It is a common impression that she has long since made way with herself, under an assumed name and in some obscure locality, the victim of an insupportable despondency, amounting, perhaps, to mental aberration."

"Such is, at all events, the earnestly professed impression and belief of the next heirs-at-law, in whose interest I am ostensibly engaged in tracking the stolen treasure. They are two nephews of the deceased banker, Jacob and Joseph Mervyn—cousins, not brothers, though fraternally hand-in-glove in their desire to pounce upon the buried cash, as may well be supposed."

Harvey Mayfield had lost not a word, though pretending to be but cursorily interested in the story.

"You use the word 'ostensibly,'" said he, half-inquiringly.

"Exactly; for I do not share in the common impression that Henriette Mervyn is dead. In reality, though unbeknown to the nephews (a heartless pair of profligate sharks), I have constituted myself a committee of one for the recovery of the stolen cash, in the interest of whomsoever it may rightfully belong to. And in the general hope, let me add, that the unfor-

tunate heiress may turn up to enjoy the fortune when unearthed."

"Rather disinterested and unselfish on your part," with a tinge of irony.

"I hope so," was the quiet rejoinder. "Though a mere detective, I generally get in my best work when my conscience and feelings are more or less interested therein, as in the present case."

"Sir, this is greatly to your credit," commented Mayfield, in another tone. "Of course this whole matter is nothing whatever to me."

"Ah!"

"But there is one thing in your story that I confess to be puzzled at."

"Let me have it, Mr. Mayfield."

"You say there was never any clew to the identity of the burglars, any more than to their disposition of the plunder?"

"Never any clew that has been made public—certainly."

"And yet you seem to be certain that the slain convict, Jem Burkitt, and his two pals, whose names you have mentioned, were the criminals."

The detective smiled, while those wild, falcon eyes of his again fastened upon the young man with piercing scrutiny.

"True; a recent discovery of mine," he admitted. "A discovery known to but one other besides myself."

"What other?"

"To yourself, Harvey Mayfield."

Mayfield laughed, half-angrily.

"Oh, if you must persist in that absurdity, have your own way!" he exclaimed. "But I hope you will excuse me from consideration of the ridiculous theme."

"As you please, young man. But, here we are at the prison at last."

By application at the office, Mayfield received back his father's saber without much difficulty, after promising to be present at the inquest over the dead convict on the following day.

He then accompanied the detective, on a permit obtained from the warden by the latter, to the hospital ward where Brummagem Bob was lying, though advised beforehand that the man was too near the point of death to be depended on for any communication of importance.

That was found to be the truth, at least to all appearances.

CHAPTER V.

THE TELL-TALE BLOTTER.

HELPLESS on his rude hospital couch, attended by a physician and a sweet-faced Sister of Charity, was Tip Barker, *alias* Brummagem Bob, sunken-eyed, frightfully emaciated, and, to all appearances, near his last gasp.

"We thought he was shamming at first," said the medical attendant in a low voice to the visitors. "But we are almost satisfied by this time that the poor fellow has really received his call."

"Almost!" echoed Mayfield under his breath. "Can there be any question of it in such a case?"

The physician smiled, and then coughed behind his hand.

"You'd be surprised to know how some of them *can* sham," he murmured. "However, I fancy Brummagem Bob is past that now."

"I should say so."

The invalid, whose vicious brutality of physiognomy was still apparent through the ravages of disease, had viewed the visitors listlessly with half-closed eyes. But the latter now lighted up feverishly.

"What if the Centerbit ain't no longer with us, Jem?" he muttered wanderingly. "We're all right. Quick; one blow more with the pick. Then the pot is ours, and we'll soon put leagues of blue water betwixt us and the sleuth-hounds. Avast there, messmate! Lay me by the heels while I hang through the cistern-hatch."

"Ah, perhaps he was once a sailor," commented the doctor. "But the end can't be far off now!"

But Mayfield's interest had deepened, while the detective had instinctively drawn a step nearer the couch, at the hidden significance of the wandering words.

The latter had abruptly ceased, however, the delirium slowly fading out of the sunken eyes.

"I say, friend!" exclaimed the detective, bending over the couch; "wouldn't you do one good act and make a restitution before you die? It is of the buried plunder I speak. Do you understand me?"

The moribund smiled contemptuously in assent. But, before Old Falcon could continue, there came into the apartment from a distance, and muffled by intervening walls, the harsh sounds of furious oaths and torrents of defiant blasphemy, followed by agonized yells—perhaps from some luckless prisoner undergoing discipline in the punishment cells.

The dying man partly raised himself, and he grasped the hand of the Sister of Charity, who was kneeling now at his side.

"I reckon I'm slipping my cable now," he gasped. "How delicious the singing of those birds at this solemn hour!"

"Ah, poor soul! you hear birds?" the good woman murmured.

"So do you, don't you?"

"But what birds?"

"The jail-birds."

And, with the perpetration of this ghastly jest, he fell back fainting, a damp sweat starting on his forehead.

"In five minutes he will have ceased to breathe," said the medical attendant, in a business-like way. "Gentlemen, you had better withdraw."

The visitors did so, the detective with evident disappointment, his companion with a sense of relief that he was careful to disguise.

Outside the prison gates, Old Falcon held out his hand.

"What! you won't walk back with me for luncheon?" exclaimed Mayfield, agreeably surprised.

"No; the next train for the city carries me with it, and I have scant time in which to reach the station. But, do not be down-hearted, young man," with good-humored irony. "We are destined to meet more than once again. Good-by till then!"

They shook hands, and Old Falcon hurried away.

Mayfield finished his homeward walk just in time for the luncheon bell.

After a hasty toilette, he seated himself at table with the rest. But, in spite of his ten-mile walk, he had little appetite for the meal, while the favoring glances of both his landlady and the fair new-comer—to say nothing of others, for the ladies had this repast almost exclusively to themselves, and his superlative good-looks rendered few if any indifferent to his presence—were alike thrown away on him; so anxious was he to return to his room, for the purpose of making a transcript from memory of the convict's scrawl, which he had so capriciously destroyed at the breakfast table.

It was over at last, however, and he hurried back to his apartment, with that one idea in his mind, and the directions of the burned writing racing confusedly through his head.

But no sooner did he plant himself at his writing-table, after locking the door, than he started back in consternation, the freshly grasped pen almost falling from between his fingers.

There before him, on a fresh sheet of white blotting-paper, was a reproduction of the precious scrawl, where the desperate writer had pounded it, wet ink-face down, with his brawny fist, after concluding the unwelcome task.

Mayfield's head began to swim, and he was in a cold sweat.

Now for the first time he recalled the blotting process on the part of the convict; and simultaneously he remembered that the eagle-eyed detective had sat in that very spot, and doubtless mastered at a glance the blotter's betrayal; which would easily account for his philosophical composure during the immolation over the brandy-flame of the *cafe noir*.

For the moment, Mayfield turned sick at heart. The vision of the buried treasure had taken a mastering hold on his imagination. He had almost come to believe his poverty virtually at an end, untold wealth all but in his grasp, the golden secret as practically his sole possession. But now!

But hold! Was it so bad as this? He seized the telltale blotter, poring over the ink-marks with the minutest scrutiny. Then he drew a long breath, and burst into a relieving laugh.

The reproduction was incomplete, the betrayer so imperfect as to leave ample room for doubt as to its being of any benefit to even such an expert as Falcon himself, should he have, indeed, succeeded in impressing the disconnected words on his memory.

Mayfield seized pen and paper, and carefully reproduced, from his own recollection, the convict's directions, to the following effect:

"Two miles S of Yonkers, well back from river road, a deserted, tumble-down country-house, avoided by every one as being haunted, in middle of old garden and orchard long since overgrown out of recognition and decency. Three cellars under house. In smaller one, to N, a covered-up cistern. Dig to iron plate. Under plate, two feet down, an opening in cistern wall. In there the tin cash boxes, crammed to the lids.

"JEM BURKITT."

This reproduction embodied the language of the destroyed writing, without its misspelling and uncouthness.

Comparing this with the blotter's revelation, Mayfield was gratified to find only this much reproduced with any degree of legibility by the latter:

"Tw. m.... S.... rs.... ll. ack fr.... r.... r.... d, ted tum.... d.... n.... try.... se.... ed.... ev. r.... ne as be.... h.... t. d, in m. dd.... of.... d g.... n a. d o. ch.... l.... g s.... o. r. g.... n o.... re.... gni.... n a.... cency. Th.... e c.... su. d.... h.... e. In s.... ll.... o. e, to N, a.... d.... p.... rn. D. g.... p.... p.... U.... p.... te, t.... f.... do.... op.... g.... c.... rn wa.... In th.... th.... t.... cash b.... s, c.... mm. d t.... th.... ds. "J. M. B.... ITT."

Try as he might, Mayfield could make no more legibility out of the blotter's impression than is embodied in the foregoing.

"A false scare!" he muttered, rubbing his hands together. "The deuce!" Even the lynx-

eyed detective could not supply these breaks and deficiencies, with blotter before him, to study over at his leisure and I must not forget that he could only have carried away this disjointed word-puzzle in his memory. His memory would be exceptionally photographic to have preserved it with any advantage to himself. My fears have played the fool with my reason. This side of death's door, and outside of Manning Grayton, the Trenton life-prisoner's, close-locked breast, I am the sole possessor of the secret, worth more than three hundred thousand dollars, unless Jem Burkitt jotted down a misleading fiction, which I am not prepared to believe."

Here there was a knock at the door.

He hastily thrust both blotter and writing in a drawer, locked it, and opened to the summons.

"Have you got such a thing as a match, monsieur?" said a seductively agreeable voice. "There is none in my room, which is next door to yours, and I am too lazy to go down-stairs."

And the speaker, Mlle. Therese Bertrande, otherwise *La Travadeuse*, or The Whirlwind, in a perfect love of a loose, richly-embroidered crimson wrapper, of a pronounced Mother Hubbard pattern, and with a freshly twisted cigarette between her pearly teeth, which were shown at their best by the smile-lighted parting of her ruby lips, floated languidly into the room, and sunk with a charming little sigh into its easiest chair.

Only discontented for a moment, and rather mystified than irritated, the aspirant for divinity laurels bowed politely, and supplied the match as requested.

While lighting her cigarette, the lady motioned him to close the door, and be seated himself.

"Your breakfast companion has doubtless told you who I am, eh?" she said, with an airy self-assurance, when he had complied.

Mayfield bowed an affirmative.

"Ah!" she went on; "then it only remains for me to explain my present intrusion. That can be partly done in a few words. Young sir, you have captivated my fancy. I like you, and when I like I love, and when I love I gratify my whim. See?"

Mayfield grew grave and distant, but her next words were enough to upset the equanimity of a Sphinx.

"There is another reason," she went on, fixing her splendid eyes upon him, "why I should seek this interview, in private, and without delay."

"May I inquire the reason, ma'm?"

"*Certainement, mon beau monsieur.* The escaped convict of this morning, with whom you held a parley of some importance, previous to his leaping out of yonder window to his death, was—my father!"

CHAPTER VI.

LA TRAVADEUSE.

HARVEY MAYFIELD could at first only stare blankly, as if doubting the evidences of his senses, in the face of this astounding declaration, which his eccentric lady visitor had, however, announced, without a particle of emotion or impressiveness, but with the most *naïve* and *insouciant* air in the world.

"Your—your father?" he stammered.

"Yes, Monsieur Harvey Mayfield," responded La Travadeuse, with a fresh smile. "You see I have found out your full name already. What won't a woman's sudden fondness venture for a man? However, I must look out for the fair but somewhat *passée* Godlove. Green in her eye already, and at her age, too! *Mon Dieu!* why, she might almost be your mother, my poor boy!"

He arrested her unseemliness with one of his abrupt characteristic gestures.

"You doubtless either jest or rave," he exclaimed. "That convict your father?"

She nodded lazily, taking the cigarette in her fingers, to allow the smoke to curl out and upward from between her red lips in pretty spirals.

"Excuse me, ma'm, if—but you are a lady and my guest, though a self-invited one." And he shrugged his shoulders significantly.

Therese Bertrande gave a low rippling little laugh, most melodiously the reverse of what might be suggested by her cyclonic surname.

"You ought to have been a Frenchman, *mon fils*—the national gesture seems to the manner born with you," said she, most amiably. "However, I like you quite as well as you are."

"You quite overcome me, ma'm."

"Don't let me, please; there's a good child. Turn your eyes, rather, yonder to the partition wall between your room and mine; and you may perceive a little crevice in the plastering, suggestive of a peep-hole in a sudden emergency."

"I don't doubt its existence, since you vouch for it," was the very gracious response. "But I never suspected it until now."

"Nor I till this morning at break of day. *Mon ami*, listen! I am a wretched sleeper in a strange bed, and last night was the first of my occupancy in yonder, as you have doubtless guessed or been informed."

"I was aroused out of probably a forty-second cat-nap by voices on this side the partition."

"Your room here, facing the east, is before-hand with mine in appropriating the first glimmerings of the new day."

"I was apprised of this, monsieur, not by any mental calculation as to our relative astronomical bearings in the domiciliary way, but by the faint first light shining in upon me through that crack in the dividing wall, which, on the other side, is close to the head of my bed, on the side occupied by my own luxurious form."

"My little angel, my Mignon, was lost in dreams on the further side—sleeping like a veritable little pig, as is her custom."

"I always occupy the inside of a couch, *mon ami*. Odd, too, considering that my constant bedfellow is a mere child, and my own daughter at that, eh? But then, I suppose it is from long habit, you will say, inseparable from hymeneal relations when my last husband—my adorable but somewhat ill-tempered Alphonse de Bertrande—was still in my good graces; for like enough the poor fellow is still alive and kicking somewhere, though he did love brandy to distraction, my friend, to distraction."

"I shall say nothing whatever as to your manner of sleeping, your Alphonse, or anything else!" interposed the young man, with growing irritation.

Though his past experience of New York free life had left him by no means saint-like where women were concerned, the easy *abandon* and matter-of-fact self-assurance of his visitor was but little to his taste, which was naturally cultivated and refined, notwithstanding her undeniable attractions: and he was, moreover, in an exasperating state of suspense over what she might or might not have seen and overheard of that eventful early morning interview.

"Ah, monsieur," continued Therese, with gentle reproof, "it is well that I am thoroughly in love with you, or your impatience, as being perhaps *outre*, if not impolite, might go far toward disenchanted me."

"But you must not again forget that I am a woman, and must needs tell my story in my own way. Otherwise I might be displeased. And I don't at all mind confessing, *mon cher*, that when I am displeased—well, my sobriquet of The Whirlwind is not solely applicable in a professional sense—I am simply a holy terror at such times."

Mayfield so far recovered his good humor as to burst out laughing, after which he politely tendered her another match for the ignition of a fresh cigarette that she had been manipulating at her pretty fingers' ends.

"*Merci, mon cher!*" she went on, quite gayly. "Ah, you can be polite as any Parisian, if you but will, and I shall love you all the better for it. *Peste!* where was I? Well, at all events, I discovered my peep-hole, and availed myself of it. Ah, the shock when I recognized in your ruffianly zebra-striped *interlocuteur* my own father—the author of my being!" But the recollection of it only caused her to grow a trifle more serious as she went on: "Imagine my agitation, monsieur. I hadn't seen him since my fourteenth year, when in London (I was ragged little Peggy Burkitt then, ignorant, dirty, a heathen of the slums, with but one skirt, a circus rider's discarded dress-waist, and half a pair of shoes to my name) he sold me, the *scelerat!* the slave-dealer! to Monsieur Ponpon, the mountebank. Though perhaps I ought not to complain, for it was my start in life. Ponpon not only launched me on my career, but in three years' time he had married me, drunk himself into the narrow house with absinthe, *le pauvre diable antique!* and left me his monkey-show, trained dog and the spring-mortar gun, with which I still perform my sole original human-cannon-ball act."

"However, one doesn't like the recollection, *mon ami*, of having been sold, especially by one's progenitor, though, to be sure, he was terribly hard-up at the time, and, having beaten my mother to death in our garret, the year previous, he doubtless naturally enough found me somewhat burdensome on his hands. However, one has their painful reminiscences, monsieur, as I remarked; so you can imagine my agitation of this morning."

"*Tonnerres de ciel!*" her eyes blazed; "I remembered my mother—myself. But that I felt his fate was upon him, I could have hurled him back as a bone to the jail-hounds with my own hands!"

"Oh, it was in that way that you were agitated by the unlooked-for recognition?" exclaimed Mayfield, who could no longer doubt the earnestness and veracity of her strange disclosure.

"*Parbleu!* Can you doubt it?" in affected surprise. "I should say so!"

"Could you—could you hear, no less than see, what passed?" asked the young man, with no little anxiety.

She nodded brightly, all her gayety returning.

"At first, no, monsieur—or but the sound of your voices, without their meaning; but, afterward, when I had mastered my peep-hole, every word, every syllable. Oh, *mon cher Harvee!*" clapping her hands, with dancing eyes; "but we shall be happy, you and I alone, with all that money! The bird-eyed detective—yes, I saw and heard his efforts to pump you, too—shall whistle for the grab-share he is aching for. My love, my darling! for you and I alone the buried wealth. I shall have a new set of dia-

monds! And my Mignon, *ma petite La Sauterelle*, my little grasshopper, neither shall she be forgotten. She will look charming in a parure of turquoise. *Mon Dieu!* we shall be rich, we shall be joyous!"

And, flinging away the stub of her cigarette, La Travadeuse sprung from her chair and began the execution of a *pas seul*, with a *furore* that was positively enchanting.

But, Mayfield was exasperated beyond bounds. What! had he but fought the expertness of the detective away from his precious secret, only to have it gripped by this devil-may-care adventuress? The thought was little short of maddening.

"Have done with this unseemliness!" he cried.

"What! you are beside yourself. Even supposing the convict's story to be true, think you that I would avail myself of a confessedly stolen treasure? You saw me nip the detective's hopes in the bud by burning up the written directions under his nose at breakfast this morning."

"Yes, yes!" without relinquishing, but rather increasing her Terpsichorean antics; "just as if you hadn't committed them safely to memory beforehand. Fie, *mon cher ami*, fie! you would keep all for yourself, when I love and adore you so?"

"But listen, Therese. The absurdity of all this, the—"

"*Dame!*" have done, my love! But you do but jest with me. Ah, we shall be so rich, so blest, you and I—not forgetting La Sauterelle! Kiss me, embrace me, my duke, my prince, my caliph of the hundred thousand little gold purses!"

And she fairly caught him in her arms, and whirled him round and round with her in the fantastic mazes she was pursuing.

Humiliated and indignant, no less than furious, the young man struggled to release himself, but a woman isn't a rope-dancer and human cannon-ball for nothing.

Sinewy and athletic as he was, La Travadeuse's muscularity and agility were in keeping with her beauty. Her plump, round arms were but fleshy sheaths of an iron strength. He was as a child in her grasp. Round and round she flew with him in the mad dance, her gay laughter rippling out between the intervals when her lips were not showering kisses upon his dazed face, till suddenly the room door was burst open, and there was an end.

Confusion worse confounded, for the hapless young man at least!

Mrs. Godlove stood at the doorway, worse than angry, an ill-concealed jealous fury in face and mien, and peeping in from behind, the grinning little face of La Sauterelle!

"All my fault, *chère madame*, all mine!" laughed Therese, sinking back in her chair in semi-convulsions of delight. "But, only look at my dear Harvee, madame! What color in his handsome cheeks! what brilliancy in his fine eyes. *Mon cher ami*, introduce yourself to madame and my daughter as my *engage*, my husband to be."

CHAPTER VII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

MAYFIELD'S furiously angry and superlatively disgusted appearance was a sufficient refutation of the adventuress's effrontery for even the pretty boarding-house mistress's satisfaction, one would suppose, though there was still a shocked, resentful look in the latter's hazel eyes.

"Madame Bertrande," said Mrs. Godlove, in a voice that strove in vain to render calm, "this strange conduct of yours will only serve to facilitate what I was on my way to your room to communicate to you."

Mlle., or Madame, Bertrande, whichever it might be, elevated her eyebrows, and, having about laughed herself out, proceeded to the preparation of a fresh cigarette.

"Dame! and what might you wish to say to me, *chère madame?*" she naively inquired.

"That I shall require your room at the earliest moment that you can secure accommodations elsewhere," was the prompt response.

"*Et pourquoi*—and for what reason, *chère madame?*"

"Don't *chère* or dear me, if you please!" exclaimed the widow, though still struggling to retain her temper. "I'm not French enough to like it. Your professional character has just been made known to me, Mrs. Bertrande, by one of my boarders, who chanced to recognize you at luncheon."

"This is interesting. He must have seen me in Paris.—Harvee, my angel, a match for my cigarette, please.—I have not appeared in this country, *ma belle Godlove*, you must understand."

Mayfield, who had by this time recovered his thoughtful self-possession, had lighted and presented the match, under mute protest, as it were.

"No need to have been in Paris," said Mrs. Godlove, contemptuously, "to recognize professionally a circus performer—or an *artiste au cirque*, as perhaps you would prefer to call it—"

"Yes, that is the more modish expression, *chère Godlove.*" gently parenthesized Therese.

"Whose portrait, in divers costumes, the re-

verse of voluminous, I am informed, is being flaunted in every bar-room window and on half the bill-boards in New York."

La Travadeuse looked unaffectedly pleased.

"What! am I so thoroughly billed already?" she cried, clapping her hands. "My agent has earned himself a kiss for this promptitude. Here!" She took a bundle of tickets from her pocket. "Dear madame, you shall have a complimentary for my opening night at the Grand Combined European and American next week. Another for you, Harvee. Come," with her prettiest laugh, "you yourself shall on this special occasion escort Godlove; unless," archly, "she should gainsay you, as is hardly possible, judging by her blushes. You have my permission, *cher ami*, and I shall try not to be jealous. But, madame! what is the matter? Don't you accept my complimentary?"

"I do not, thanks all the same!" And Mrs. Godlove seemed to restrain with difficulty an impulse to throw the 'complimentary' into the woman's face, though she managed to merely drop it in her lap with a significant movement of washing out a contaminating contact from her hands. "And now that I have made myself understood, ma'm—without unnecessary peremptoriness, I hope—pray, when can I have your room?"

The young man made a deprecatory gesture. He had irresolutely kept in his hand the ticket Therese had given him, and, with the sober second thought of her indubitable connection with his secret, was beginning to think it worth while to temporize at any cost. But she had suddenly grown grave, and left no time for other than his tacit interposition.

"Mignon, *ea ira*—leave us!" she said, sharply, to the child.

"Oh, maman!"

"Return to your pastime on the lawn—don't let me speak it again!" Then, as Mignon disappeared in a series of eccentric hops, not unlike the insect that characterized her, La Travadeuse turned with a really grand air to the mistress of the house: "So madame?"

The latter likewise drew herself up dignifiedly, her pretty cheeks flushing darkly, though with none of the shame-facedness that had been so brazenly imputed to them, saying, shortly:

"I think I have expressed myself with clearness, Mrs. Bertrande."

"You give me plain notice to quit your house?"

"Plainly, yes."

"Because I am a circus performer?"

"Chiefly that, ma'm." But with a glance around that unmistakably alluded to the private exhibition that had been interrupted. "Do not misunderstand me, however, ma'm," with hypocritical self-justification, "as venturing to reflect upon your profession, or upon yourself personally. But my guests, especially my lady guests, being of a superior class, and therefore more or less fastidious, not to say prejudiced—"

The actress-adventress interrupted her with a swift gesture and a disagreeable little laugh.

"Guests?" she echoed, disdainfully. "My dear woman, even if you are not French, cannot you speak your own language? Guests, indeed, with the hospitality extended at a round sum per week!"

"Boarders, then, if it suits you better!" returned Mrs. Godlove, somewhat savagely.

"That will do. Well, you demand my departure from your house, eh?"

"Yes."

"It is well to be plain-spoken. I simply sha'n't go till it suits my leisurely convenience. You understand me? It pleases me to defy you, ma'm. Howell, my dear, get another light, if you will be so kind?" And lolling back into her easy-chair, Therese complacently began the rolling of a fresh cigarette.

Mrs. Godlove stared, and then quickly assumed her most resolute look.

"You will find, madam, that I am not to be successfully defied in my own house."

She was coldly hurrying away.

"What a pity!" observed the latter half to herself.

"What is it that is a pity, ma'm?" exclaimed the widow, angrily.

"That you and I should fall out over an exceedingly handsome young friend, here," continued the other, coolly. "For of course that will be the talk among your superior *guests*, as you call them; or, if it isn't of their own volition, I shall assuredly make it so. Fie, Godlove, fie! And when I have already set the seal of my preference upon the charming fellow, too—to say nothing of your age!"

Mrs. Godlove's face became as positively demoniac as was consistent with her undeniable, if somewhat *passee*, comeliness, for that she affected the young man, if not altogether consummately, at least with something more than motherliness, was an open secret throughout the household. While Mayfield, on his part, turned red and white by turns, and was certainly more embarrassed and uncomfortable than ever before in his life.

The former fairly crimsoned, and then she wheeled upon her tormentor in a white wrath.

"Woman!" she hoarsely exclaimed; "your

effrontery would be beneath contempt, were it not insulting. At least, I can command you here. This is not your room; retire from it this instant!"

Therese burst into her rippling, devil-may-care laugh.

"Ah, but it was *you* that first declared war, and you have my protocol, you dear, delicious old thing, you!" she cried, jumping up and snapping her fingers. "Au revoir, my life, my love, my own Harvee! Extol my trust in you, my magnanimity. I even leave you alone with her!"

She merrily kissed him on both cheeks and the lips, in spite of his unaffected efforts to escape her, and then, with a parting laugh, danced out of the room, closing the door behind her with a bang.

In spite of his confusion, which was little short of agonizing, Mayfield thought that he had never seen Mrs. Godlove so handsome, or so pathetically pretty, as in the mingled shame, embarrassment and appeal with which she turned to him.

"O'a, Mr. Mayfield, what am I to do?" she exclaimed, piteously. "That dreadful woman! her insinuations! her absurdities! Was ever the like of it?"

Mayfield could only snatch up a newspaper, and set to fanning himself furiously. His sensations were alternately those of an oven and an ice-box.

"To think of the creature's effrontery!" continued the pretty widow, falteringly. "Her connection of your name with mine—making light of sentiments that should be so sacred—Ah!"

He was just in time to catch her as she tottered and reeled, and then a half-uttered imprecation rose from the young man's badgered and tormented inner conscience as the plump, rotund figure of the susceptible *maitresse de la maison* settled in a seemingly dead faint in his inclosing arms.

Mayfield was half beside himself with rage and mortification.

There was no bell-rope to pull, so, still reluctantly supporting his fair burden, he tore open the door, and bellowed down the stairways for assistance.

But, even as it came in response to his summons, there was a scream of laughter from behind the partition wall, as ample evidence that La Travadeuse at her peep-hole had missed nothing of the tableau.

But she had come out victorious, for all that. Outward amiability was thereafter the order of the day between the two ladies, and Mrs. Godlove prudently abstained from pressing the point as to Therese's room being preferable to her society.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CELLAR TO THE NORTH.

A MONTH had passed away when, late one sultry night, Harvey Mayfield slipped out of his boarding-house, with the intention of taking the late south-bound Express as far as Yonkers, in a first attempt at searching for the alleged buried treasure.

Not another word or sign in the interim had he received from Old Falcon, the detective. Therese had likewise kept considerably undemonstrative with respect to the haunting subject. That what she had commanded of his devotion, in return for her capricious affection for him, was presumably the price demanded for her considerateness, he did not care, since he had managed to hold his own with both her and the widow, without much more than an occasional flare-up. The main desideratum was that the coast was, to all appearances, reasonably clear at last for this initial experiment in testing the reality or falsity of the felon's legacy, as it might be called.

He had reconnoitered the spot by daylight a week previous, and found an encouraging external agreement with the written directions, besides making certain preliminary observations that might assist his present undertaking.

He carried with him a large, stout grip-sack, that he hoped to carry away from the designated spot filled to bursting with unearthed currency.

Harvey Mayfield was naturally a young man of noble instincts and good, average principles; but, like many another poetical temperament, of extravagant desires, miserably associated with life-long repression and grinding poverty, he had taken the eager first steps at the beck of a powerful but ignoble temptation, which had been swiftly followed by gigantic strides perditionward, until the base bewitchment at last possessed him, body and soul, with the irreversible influence of a necromancer's spell.

Conscience had been stilled, the finer sensibilities dulled, the better angel of his nature glamoured and benumbed. He would be rich, rich, rich! Nothing else would satisfy him now, and even at the cost of honor, fair dealing, and integrity—all that he had once (and such a startlingly short time as to almost bewilder him) held so jealously vital and dear. He had so brooded over the probable truth of the felon's legacy that the desire to substantiate it by personal possession had become the haunting

mania of his life, to the exclusion of every other thought, motive, emotion and ambition. Even the cravings for woman's approbation, the vanities so natural and pardonable to youth, hot blood and good looks, as instanced by Therese Bertrande's impulsive admiration, and the handsome Mrs. Godlove's perhaps far worthier passion, had become as nothing, and shriveled as in the scorching blaze of this fatal and degrading fascination.

He had become demoralized to the loathsome level of the coarse, brutish criminals, whose ill-gotten spoils he was so willing and anxious to surreptitiously enjoy. And all this unconsciously, as it were, which rendered the moral ruin so much the more painful. Even the detective's pathetic story as to the real and just ownership of the money, whose filching had destroyed one worthy life, and sent one other, a younger, fairer, and yet more innocent one, into the obscurity of a nameless exile, and perhaps to suicide among undeserved penury and thickening misfortunes, which had at first appealed strongly to his sensibilities, had lapsed into the far-away meaning and dim-drawn applicability of a half-forgotten tale. He even found himself bringing the most transparent sophistries to bear in justification of his right to appropriate the stolen treasure, without being wholly aware that they were aught but conscientious reasonings to the same nefarious end.

In a few words, the young man had been painlessly, lamentably metamorphosed. And the Harvey Mayfield now setting out upon this dishonest midnight treasure-quest was about as widely different from the Harvey Mayfield immediately prior to the fateful meeting with the escaped convict, Jem Burkitt, but a brief month previous, at the opening of our story, as was the bideous Mr. Hyde from its dual personality of Dr. Jekyll.

Arriving at Yonkers, Mayfield struck straight southward through the sleeping and silent town by the splendid, villa-lined causeway running parallel with the Hudson, until well out of the outskirts, upon the distinctive river-road, when he continued on his way at a yet brisker and more impatient pace.

It was a rather dark night, with sufficient stars, however, to render the road rather distinct, after the limits of the street-lamps had been passed.

The road grew steadily lonelier and the country residences more widely separated as he proceeded, with here and there wild-looking fields and short stretches of gloomy woodland to be traversed.

But the summer air was sweet and bland, and, with the fever of anticipation in his heart, the way could scarcely be too solitary and unobtrusive for our "pale wamer" through the night."

A distant church clock tolled the midnight hour as at last, after a swift two-mile tramp, he came to a pañse before the neglected grounds of the deserted cottage that was his destination.

After a precautionary glance in every direction, he pushed through the gate, produced a dark-lantern from his grip-sack, which he forthwith lighted, and then proceeded up the weed-grown garden-path, under the neglected orchard trees, with his eyes fixed when possible upon the cottage.

Suddenly he hesitated, started and paused. Was not that a twinkle of lamp-light from one of the attic-windows? No; it was doubtless but a freak of his overwrought fancy; for see! all is dark, somber, forbidding and unchanged. There could be no one beforehand with him, in respect to the alleged treasure; and as for ghosts, he recalled the uncanny reputation of the place with a smile that had nothing of bragadocio in it.

The only phantoms that Harvey Mayfield cared a snap for were such golden ones as he hoped to materialize in short order. For the rest, divinity student as he had once thought to be—how immensely long ago that virtuous period of his aspirations, though scarcely more than thirty days in reality! He had come to look back on it as something antiquated beyond realization, something like the ruins of Babylon or the site of ancient Troy—there was not a particle of superstition in his strong, healthy and selfish nature.

His preliminary visit to the place, which had also included a hasty exploration of the cottage interior, now enabled him to proceed with considerable certainty and assurance.

He first went to a rickety tool-house, where he secured a pickax and spade, both rusty and pretty well used up, but such as would doubtless more than outlast his purpose.

He then entered the house by a rear kitchen-door, the mystery of whose simple lock he had already mastered.

The cottage was more than half-furnished, though everything was in a sad state of neglect and decay.

Tables and chairs were in moldering keeping with the ceiling and walls, from which in many places the plaster had tumbled away, letting the lathing stare and grin out from underneath in a decidedly skeletonian and unpleasant manner, as the bull's-eye of the intruder flashed and shifted fitfully hither and thither.

But, as has been said, Mayfield had a good, orderly set of nerves.

However, he was proceeding, after a cursory glance all round, directly to the cellar stairs, and already had his hand on the door, when a slight noise, real or fancied, apparently from somewhere up in the attic, recalled the streak of light fancied to have been seen at one of the dormer windows, and he paused and listened.

The alarm was not repeated.

He half-turned, with the intention of re-examining the upper rooms before proceeding to the cellars, but paused again in impatient self-contempt.

"Pshaw!" he muttered; "it was merely a rat or a wandering wind. I explored the rooms from top to bottom once, and no one can have entered the house since then. The entrance-door yonder showed no signs of having been tampered with afresh."

With that, he continued on down below, and presently found himself in the cellar compartment directly under the kitchen.

It was close-smelling and empty, save for some old barrels and a few sickly-looking fungous growths directly under the narrow half-window, by which light and air were admitted from the garden-level.

The next cellar, going forward under the dining-room, was littered with boxes and barrels, in some places piled up to the height of the bare rafters.

Then, with hurried steps, he was in the third cellar, directly beneath the parlor—the small cellar to the north, the cellar of the alleged buried treasure—and the young man drew a long breath as he propped his lantern, with its light fully exposed, upon a ledge of masonry, and grasped the pick with a nervous grasp.

The place was damp, ill-smelling, devoid of rubbish, about sixteen feet square, and with few or no signs of its hard-packed earth-flooring having ever been disturbed.

CHAPTER IX.

TREASURE TROVE.

"THE rascals certainly managed to cover up their work well," thought the searcher, with a last glance over the beaten floor before selecting a spot in which to begin digging—"that is, supposing that they really were here, and I am not the dupe of a desperate criminal's parting joke!"

The very possibility of such a disappointment in prospect caused the sweat to start on his forehead and cold shivers to run through his frame, as the sudden apparition of any number of the alleged ghosts pertaining to the locality could not have evoked.

In an instant, however, he had shaken off his depression, and driven his pick into a corner of the cellar-bed where the presence of a piece of broken iron pipe against the wall suggested that the covered-up cistern might have once been communicated with.

With the initial stroke, his sanguine spirits seemed to return to him with a rush.

Alternately with pick and spade, he digged and delved with scarcely an instant's cessation, notwithstanding that the earth was tantalizingly solid, and, in places, almost as hard as stone.

At last, when about a foot and a half down, sheer exhaustion compelled him to take a momentary rest.

Could he have seen his own face, as he paused on the edge of the wide, ragged, shallow trench, wiping his heated brow with a trembling hand, and half-ready to drop with the heat induced by his unwonted exertions—for he had not even paused to discard his coat and waistcoat—its aspect might have frightened him.

It was not only lividly pale, but also distorted and in a measure transformed, under the undisguised impress of those base passions and that demoralization that had latterly claimed him so indubitably as their prey.

"The deuce!" he muttered, hoarsely. "What could have induced them to have so packed down the earth over their secret, in this secluded place, too, as to make it like iron? That is, if—supposing—"

But the return of the doubt was maddening.

He tore off his upper garments, flung them into a heap over the open grip-sack, that had been gaping and staring at him in a sort of mockery, and once more set to work with clinched teeth and knitted brows.

But realization was at hand.

At scarcely a dozen additional strokes the ground grew more yielding, with indications of its having been previously disturbed and then hastily thrown back.

He now worked like a madman.

He had discarded the pick altogether, and at last the spade, sinking through the last few inches of loose earth, struck forth a hollow, metallic sound.

An instant later, the round iron plate of the cistern cover, with a large lifting-ring in the center, was exposed to view.

Mayfield uttered a husky cry of triumph, and, once more exhausted, though more by excitement than physical fatigue, he sat on the edge of the excavation, trembling like a leaf.

The pallor of his face gave way to a purpling

flush, which, however, was yet more lamentable; for the features remained distorted and drawn, and the ruthless, dishonest devil of the man's nature was more thoroughly, gloatingly to the front than theretofore.

"No longer a doubt of it!" he gasped through his dry, parched lips. "I shall be rich—rich—rich!"

The cistern-plate was lifted, and set carefully on edge at the side of the opening, with less difficulty than might have been anticipated.

He then got the lantern, and, bending with it far down through the opening, which was roomy enough, examined the interior.

A single glance was sufficient to prompt a shout of "*Nil ultra!*" to his proudest hopes.

The cistern, an uncommonly large and deep one, was more than half-filled with plaster, bricks and other rubbish; and, still better, after the first admission of air from above, was neither so offensive nor close-smelling as one would have looked for.

At one side, about midway down to the rubbly filling-in, the cement and masonry had been torn out for the construction of a rude, jagged receptacle, a foot and a half or two feet square.

The lowered lantern, flinging some of its beams into this receptacle, brought out the metallic glistening and even the distinct outlines of tin boxes, such as are used for cash and bonds in bank-vaults, piled in orderly rows.

Breathless, the young man tried to reach into the hole after one of the boxes, but from his then attitude the stretch was too much for even his greedy arms.

"However," he grumbled, "better, perhaps, down there than elsewhere for a primary haul."

He reached down far enough to drop the lantern easily upon the rubbish-heap, scrambled back, then up out of the excavation; and, hurriedly resuming his coat and vest, for it was damp and chilly enough back down there, was speedily at the bottom of the choked cistern, grip-sack in hand.

Dropping the latter, and raising the lantern, he peered into the hole in the wall with glistening and rapidly enlarging eyes.

There were as many as twenty of the cash-boxes piled within!

Pulling out and tearing open the first one to his hand, once more a hoarse, muffled cry, like that of a long-famishing beast over a *cache* of stored meats, broke from his lips.

It was filled with bundles of crisp greenbacks of the fifty-dollar denomination, and, as shown by a swift, trembling manipulation, a thousand dollars to the package, making ten thousand dollars as the entire contents.

Forcing himself to a methodical coolness of search and estimate, he proceeded with the inventory *seriatim*.

The next box disclosed contents exactly similar to the first. The next after that, being unexpectedly heavy, was found to be brimmed with silver half-dollars. Three succeeding ones produced a like revelation. Then came a box yet heavier. It was filled to the top with upended pink-papered rolls of double gold eagles. There were three more similar boxes, equally packed, one with ten-dollar, another with five-dollar, and the third with quarter-eagle gold pieces. Twelve boxes remained for examination, making twenty-two in all. They were found severally packed with bundles of bank-notes of various denominations—twenties, tens, fives and twos.

Mayfield sat down on the center of the rubbish heap, and, after pressing both hands to his temples, as if to quiet their tumultuous throbings, gazed dreamily around him, and yet with gloating eyes.

His dream of wealth was in his grasp. The written promise of the dead convict had materialized. Around him were the open treasure-boxes, "crammed to the lids," as had been scrawled down by that desperate hand a moment or two before it was stilled forever.

At a rough estimate, there was considerably more than three hundred thousand dollars represented in all, coin and paper—perhaps twenty thousand in excess of that round and princely amount.

For some minutes the young man sat thus in silence, alone with the stolen treasure, the purloined fortune.

Surely it was his by treasure-trove. Or, at least, he had come so near to that line of thinking, as to have scarcely a remaining qualm as to its appropriation to his own pleasures and desires.

Then he aroused himself, and his ideas began to take a business-like and practical turn.

He must remove and bank the wealth to his credit by degrees, or suspicion might be excited.

He made what he considered a modest beginning in this course by stuffing the grip-sack to its full capacity with bunches of fifty, twenty, ten and five-dollar greenbacks to the amount of fifteen thousand dollars. As much more, some in rolls of gold (he had already come to look on the silver coin with disdainful contempt), but chiefly in bills of various denominations, went to the comfortable, not to say plethoric, lining of every pocket he had at his disposal. In fact, he thought seriously of distributing more of the

money in his shoes under the soles of his feet, and around under the lining of his derby hat, but finally gave up the notion with the *sotto voce* soliloquy that it might be as well not to play the hog at a first venture.

"There!" he muttered, after completing these arrangements. "The thirty thousand I shall carry away is doubtless the excess, and will round off the three hundred thousand to be left behind quite nicely. That should satisfy me for the present, and what remains—with Grayton safely entombed alive in his life-imprisonment, and Brummagem Bob probably dead and buried long ere now (though I must not neglect some precautionary inquiries in these regards) is safer right here than in any bank-vault in the country. Good! good! good! But no enthusiasm, no hysterics, young man! Thorough is the word hereafter, and cold, secretive horse-sense as the talisman for security."

After returning the cash-boxes to their receptacle, he was about to climb up out of the cistern, with the grip-sack in one hand and the lantern in the other, when his head struck against a chain, dangling from the lower side of the uptilted plate-cover, which he had not perceived before.

"Hallo!" he thought; "this would argue that the cistern has some time or other been used as a human, no less than a money, hiding-place."

However, he lost no further time in clambering out of the cistern and the over-topping excavation, after which he replaced the iron plate, and filled in the earth above it, though much more loosely than before.

He had scarcely reached the top of the cellar stairs, though, when there was the sound of something falling in one of the upper rooms.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNEXPECTED FIND.

THIS time the alarm was unmistakable, and the sound had evidently come from the attic, as had the half-suspected admonitions that had preceded it.

"Had there been some lurker in the old house after all? and with a possibility of his, Mayfield's searchings having been secretly spied upon?"

The young man at first turned pale, though he was not lacking in physical, howsoever he might be in want of moral, stamina.

Then the fierce, savage resolve, so natural to a brave man in being summoned to defend his property against a lawless marauder, came flashing into his face and eyes.

The inconsistency of his virtuous indignation was wholly unapparent to his deteriorated conscience and indurated sensibilities.

It was his wealth, his property—hard-earned by thirty days' brooding anxiety and as many minutes' sweat of the brow with pick and spade—that was at stake, and he would defend it to the death!

Shifting the lantern to the same hand that clutched the treasure-crammed grip-sack, with the other he grasped his revolver; and, thus prepared, began to ascend to the second floor, with cautious but untrembling steps, compressed lips and undaunted brow.

There were but three second-floor rooms, and these were found deserted, with no signs of having even been entered before in a great while.

But a dim light was perceived under the closed door at the top of the narrow stairs leading on up to the attic, from which the sound had, it was now beyond doubt, proceeded.

As Mayfield approached this door, he became aware of gasping, struggling sounds from within, that somehow vaguely excited his commisera-

Incontinently bursting open the door, and springing into the one large room of which the entire attic-floor was composed, and which was feebly lighted by a guttering candle stuck in a bottle near one of the windows that had been jealously curtained in, a terrible and most unexpected sight met his astounded gaze.

Suspended from a hook in the opposite wall was a human being—a young woman—in the final throes of strangulation; the overturned chair almost directly underneath, whose fall had produced the alarm heard below, telling with startling significance the suicidal story.

The unfortunate creature was all but gone—already black in the face, in fact—though she was still feebly struggling, while faint, choking gasps were yet being emitted from the cord-encircled throat.

To drop his burdens, cast aside his pistol, and rush forward to the rescue, with a loud, sympathetic shout, was the work of an instant on the part of the horrified Mayfield.

The next instant he had cut her down, torn away the throttling cord, and she was helpless, though faintly striving to catch back the breath of life in his arms.

Fortunately, Mayfield was not wholly ignorant of the best means of resuscitation in such a case; and he praised God that his chance succor had not been delayed a moment, else in all probability it would have come too late.

A large jug of water, together with a glass and a small vial, stood on a rickety table near at hand.

By a lavish use of the water, combined with

an assiduous chafing of the young woman's hands, wrists and temples, not forgetting to assist and stimulate the labored action of breathing by artificial means, the critical point was presently surmounted.

Then, after a brief, bewildered quiescence, resembling a swoon (during which the young man perceived that the sufferer was not only young, but exceedingly beautiful, with delicate hands, feet small to a fault, and a generally refined, cultivated air, though emaciated as with prolonged hardships, and very poorly though neatly dressed) she sighed, the color came back slowly into her cheeks, and as she opened her eyes on him he saw that she was thoroughly composed and collected.

Then, suddenly realizing for the first time that he was a stranger, and she in his arms, she swiftly disengaged herself, rose tremblingly, and stood partly averted from him, with her hands clasped and her head sunk on her troubled breast.

"I begin to realize it—everything!" she at last said, in a low sweet voice, but one of inconceivable sadness and dreariness. "Of course I can't imagine who you are, sir, or how you chanced in this secluded spot I had selected to end my miseries in. And I am not yet prepared to say whether I am glad or sorry that you snatched me back from my doom—from death—from my longed-for oblivion."

The young man had momentarily forgotten his new wealth, his better nature and nobler sensibilities being uppermost for the nonce.

"Life should be sweet," he gravely responded, "and death—most of all self-sought death—far from the thoughts of beauty and youth."

She made an impatient gesture that struck him oddly as being very similar to the quick, abrupt ones that were characteristic of his own personality, but only answered with continued meekness and sorrowfulness:

"Perhaps so. I pray you, sir, to indulge my weakness for a few moments, after which I shall be able to confront my changed situation with more composure."

He nodded, and then made a hesitating movement, uncertain whether she desired to be left alone in the attic or not.

But she only crossed the floor with feeble steps to an old-fashioned settee, provided with dusty cushions, near to where the miserable candle was guttering and sputtering, and quietly laid her length upon it with her back toward him.

Buried in thought, the young man merely noted that the young girl's form was peerless in its grace and symmetry, even surpassing what he remembered of La Travadeuse's admired and statuesque figure in those regards.

Then he quietly repossessed himself of his grip-sack and lantern, restored the revolver to his pocket, and, seating himself in one of the two chairs in the place, awaited the strange young woman's pleasure with certain ill-defined feelings of curiosity such as he had never quite experienced before.

What was the new sensation, premonition, or what not, that was upon him?

Even the coveted wealth in his grasp seemed to have become of secondary importance for the time being, and he found himself contemplating the graceful young figure in the dim candle and lantern light—which was now, however, giving way before the steadily increasing, pinkly tender luster of the summer dawn—with indescribable interest and emotion.

What was it?

A little later, when the young woman composedly rose, and once more approached him, her face and figure tenderly distinct in the new light, he knew what it was.

Never before had he seen a creature so refinedly, so sadly, so pathetically lovely.

For the first time in his life—and he was now twenty-six—love at sight, the master passion, asserting itself without premonition or preparation, was his sovereign and his better angel. He loved her!

Another brunette, too!

Was it his fatality? And yet the blonde young fellow found himself flushing at comparing this delicate young stranger with Mrs. Godlove, whose mature blandishments had not unfrequently dwelt warmly in his imagination; while the mere suggestion of Therese Bertrande's bold beauty and ravishing black eyes in a like comparison was sufficient to summon the indignant shame-faced blush into his cheeks, as at a piece of sacrilege.

Perhaps the young woman, on her part, remarked the superlative manly beauty of the young fellow with some degree of surprise.

But her gentle, inexpressible sadness was scarcely ameliorated, as she slowly crossed the garret floor to him, and sunk into the remaining chair, with something discontented and chiding in her profoundly dejected air.

"Of course, I must thank you, sir," she said, moodily. "But, why did you do it?"

"Do what?" he wonderingly asked.

"Cut me down." And she glanced without a shudder at the remnant of the cord dangling from the iron hook. "Ah, but it was my own vacillating fault. I should have swallowed the poison first, and so made sure."

The young man snatched up from its proximity to the water-jug the vial, to which her eyes drew his attention, and turned the label to the growing light.

Laudanum!

Mayfield shuddered. "Don't talk in that way—please don't," he exclaimed. "It is horrible! It—it makes me unhappy."

The surprise returned into the sweet, sad brown eyes, and deepened there.

"It makes *you* unhappy?" she slowly repeated.

CHAPTER XI.

LOVE AT SIGHT.

THE young man found himself blushing uncomfortably at the girl's repetition of his own words in the wondering and interrogatory form.

"Yes," he reiterated, half-doggedly. "Such horribly despairing language from your lips—it makes me positively unhappy."

"But why should it?"

He strove to laugh, but with poor success.

"Wasn't the language unnatural and horrible enough in itself, miss?"

"Yes; but why from my lips especially—from one who is a perfect stranger to you?"

"I don't know—how should I know?" He was blushing again, and so furiously, so unaccountably—for extreme diffidence with the opposite sex was by no means one of this young man's characteristics—as to excite his anger and self-contempt. "I—I suppose it's because I—I find myself suddenly—quite abruptly and unexpectedly, in fact—interested in you. Really, it is quite inexplicable." And his eyes shifted about helplessly.

The young girl's eyes rested upon him curiously and with deep gravity.

"Will you please tell me your name, sir?" she asked, in her low, but collected voice.

"Harvey Mayfield," was the prompt reply.

This seemed to be getting back into matter-of-factness at last, and her rescuer was speedily becoming his old self again.

"What's yours?" he demanded.

A faint, but not displeased, color came into the pure olive pallor of her sweet face at his abruptness.

"Retta Merrivale," she hesitatingly replied.

"What a very pretty name."

She almost smiled, the exclamation was so boyishly impulsive—so different from what she judged must be his accustomed ways.

"Your own name is not an ugly one, by any means," she said, in a sort of weary, I-return-you-the-compliment way that was not altogether flattering.

"Let us explain things to each other, Miss Merrivale," Harvey went on to say. "We will not allude again to—to—" He glanced at the suspended cord nervously, and then, snatching up the vial again, tossed it out of the window near which they were sitting, and which, as it faced the east, was now giving entrance to the dawn-light in roseate floods and streaks. "No, no; no more of that. But how is it that you happen to be here in this miserably secluded and deserted house?"

"How is it that you happen to be in it?" was her counter question.

The young man bit his lip, and unconsciously drew his precious grip-sack closer to his feet.

"Oh, indeed!" he laughed. "But is it so strange that I, having heard of the haunted reputation of the place, should have been attracted hither by the faint glimmer of your candle-light?"

"There was no such glimmer, sir; I had taken the precaution to curtain in the room."

"There was, nevertheless, a stray glimmer!" cried the other, with truthfulness. "I swear it!"

"Granted. But do people naturally take to haunted houses at midnight, when attracted by stray candle-gleams?"

"I, for one, am not averse to them," said Harvey, candidly. "If there is one thing that I have an unaffected contempt for and disbelief in, it is ghosts."

"Why seek them, then?" And there was something almost quizzical in a corner of her grave eyes.

"Seek them!" he echoed.

"Yes."

"But I don't."

"Nevertheless," demurely, "the haunted reputation, together with the ghostly candle-gleam, was your sole attraction."

"Oh, ah! Well, you see—what does it matter, anyway?" And he was evidently resolving to be more cautious with so shrewd a companion.

But she was disposed to be somewhat merciless in her drearily humorous way.

"Besides," she went on, "that could be hardly indispensable in a hunt for ghosts, who might be expected to light one's way with the glimmer of their own impalpable and diaphanous forms." And she touched the still burning dark-lantern with her foot, while even glancing at the grip-sack.

He half angrily extinguished the one, and snatched up the other across his knees, without attempting a reply.

"Moreover," she went on, "I heard you when you first entered the cottage by the back door—at least, I heard somebody enter; and that was a good long hour before—before the fall of the chair that I kick away from under me must have brought you up into the attic here."

"I say, Miss Merrivale," Mayfield blurried out, half appealingly, "never mind exactly why I chanced in this cottage, will you? Then I won't ask you anything more as to your own presence here. That's square, isn't it now?"

Her smile was unmistakable now, though but for an instant, and he could forgive her its amusement at his expense, so charmingly did it part the perfect lips, to the revelation of the perfect teeth behind them.

"You are at least frank, Mr. Mayfield—frank after your fashion, you know," she said, quickly grave again. "But I sha'n't accept the privilege of making *quite* so much of a mystery of myself in return. Is it so strange, then, that I should also be found in this place?"

"It is strange, miss—awfully so!"

"But why? I am a poor, underpaid work-girl of the not remote neighborhood—a wretched operative of the Yonkers carpet manufactories, in fact, without relatives, friends or money, and with the unusually hard, grinding work and worse associations—all foreign to my past life and breeding—filling me at last with unbearable hopelessness and despair. Such, in truth, is my simple history, sir. Is it then so strange that I, also, might have known of this deserted and lonely place by reputation, and—and so have been attracted hither, though of course with a far less honest, far more reprehensible object in view than *yours* could have been?"

Somehow her concluding words made him wince, he felt that he so little deserved the generous side of her comparison.

"Oh, I see—I understand!" he exclaimed, impulsively. "But, don't say you are still friendless, miss. I am going to be your friend,"—with another blush and a kindling of the eyes that intensified his comeliness—"that is if you will let me, you know."

She lowered her eyes.

"I should already be greatly beholden to you," she murmured, beginning to pick at her poor gown with both hands in an aimless, confused way. "You have saved me—saved me from my wicked designs upon myself."

"God be praised for that! But, no more on that score. I would continue your friend—do yet more for you—be yet more to you!" disjointedly.

"What—what do you mean?"

But even then, as she raised her eyes, and caught the new, magnetic light in his, with the glorious auroral beams illuminating his frank, fair face, at this moment redeemed and noble in its pristine purity, she saw and understood.

Had his new-born and guileless passion awakened a responsive thrill in her youthful, but theretofore clouded and misery-numbed, sensibilities?

Who shall yet say? For even stranger, more mysterious in the heart of maidenhood than in the heart of man is the kindling of the divine spark, the inception and springing into flower of that magic growth, love at first sight. But at all events a pronounced color overspread the pure pallor of her face, and her eyes were troubled as she once more lowered them beneath his steadfast gaze.

"Who and what are you, sir?" she asked, tremblingly.

"A young man of leisure, at present boarding in Tarrytown," he replied, after a pause. "A young fellow, fortunately of ample means—recently acquired," he slowly added, "who until quite lately had a strong idea of becoming a student of divinity—but who now hasn't anything of the sort."

She seemed somewhat surprised, but he hurriedly went on to give her the main points in his uneventful past—of course only prior to his connection with the felon's legacy.

The story carried with it the impress of its unassuming truthfulness.

"Why should you so suddenly have given up your inclinations for a sacred and unselfish calling?" Retta asked. "I can't understand it."

The young man seemed to be forcing slowly to the surface a sudden and strongly-conceived resolve.

"And I cannot make you understand it any better—not yet, at least," he replied, unsteadily, and half-averting his face. "But I can tell you why, since the beginning of our acquaintance here, I have at last put my irrevocable seal upon my renunciation of those recent leavings to what you are pleased to style a sacred and unselfish calling."

"Why is it, then?" she asked, wholly unsuspectingly.

He raised his gray eyes flutteringly, uneasily, almost agonizedly to her sweet face.

"It is because I love you!"

CHAPTER XII.

TWO STRANGE YOUNG MEN.

HALF an hour later, when Retta Merrivale and Harvey Mayfield were entering the outskirts of Yonkers, after a friendly side-by-side walk from the haunted cottage, in the sweet

early-morning summer air, the former came to a pause.

"Yonder is my boarding-place," said she, pointing to a poor but pleasantly surrounded little house, at whose modest garden-gate they had stopped. "Fortunately, it is yet very early. I shall have ample time for breakfast, before setting out for the mill."

"You are not going to the mill any more. For God's sake, if not for mine, don't think of such a thing, Miss Merrivale!"

There was a suggestion of privilege, if not exactly of proprietorship, in his opening words, that did not seem wholly displeasing to her; and she had as yet made no certain reply to his abrupt declaration, or afforded him actual encouragement.

Still, the avowal had been succeeded by a confused exchange of certain confidences, and the youthful pair were already friends, with something more than a possibility of being yet better and closer ones.

The young woman had placed her hand on the gate, without making a reply.

Dearly would she rejoice to quit the coarse and wearying drudgery that was bearing down so crushingly upon her young life. Nothing could please her better; but still she would not sacrifice her proud independence.

"I have already told you, Mr. Mayfield," she said, in her low, firm voice, "that I cannot and will not accept charity from you, or from any man."

"Charity? But it isn't charity I offer, Retta," he cried, eagerly—after which he made a delighted pause, to realize that she did not resent his use of her Christian name. "Haven't I laid my heart bare to you unreservedly? And, if you can't exactly love me in return—not yet, perhaps—doesn't the other fact—the fact of my loving you, and being rich, you know—give you a perfect right—nay, impose a sort of necessity upon you—to let me relieve your distress?"

She smiled while shaking her head, and yet with a slight suggestion of giving or modifying her refusal, his words were so eager, so enthusiastic.

"Hardly," she replied. "That isn't the way of the world—Harvey."

He flushed with pleasure.

"But it is *my* way!" he exclaimed, joyously. "Besides," argumentatively again, "since you say you could earn a subsistence by giving lessons in music and singing, if you had but a fair start, whatever you would take from me might be only as a loan, you know."

"Under no other circumstances could I think of taking anything," she murmured, irresolutely. "And yet so much depends on influence, recommendations, and all that, it might be long—oh, ever so long before I could return it."

For answer, he snatched one of her hands and kissed it—it was still so early that there was but slight risk of the action being observed—with as much respectfulness as if it had been his sister's. After which he drew a package of twenty-dollar bills from his breast-pocket, and gayly counted ten of them into her hands.

Her eyes sparkled. But the careless manner of the gift seemed to astonish her yet more than the money itself, long as she had been unused to the display of such affluence.

"It is too much!" she half-gasped.

"Not half, nor quarter, enough," with an airy gesture, as he returned the roll to his pocket, and patted his grip-sack with an unconsciously caressing movement—he had left the dark-lantern behind in the old house. "But if you'll only bear in mind that there's any quantity more of it for you in the same loan-office, I sha'n't grumble."

What a curse is poverty, what a blessing wealth, contrasting each other no less sharply and bitterly than misery and beatitude, Hell and Heaven!

The flush of assured relief was already in the befriended girl's face and eyes, though it was with a sort of dreamy and mechanical breathlessness that she folded up the crisp bills and hid them in her bosom.

"You must be very rich!" was all she could say at first.

"So so!" a little uneasily. "I don't complain."

"And yet your wealth has come to you but recently, you say."

"Yes. At least, I am not so used to it as to have become slavishly grasping and mean, as I have remarked the vast majority of your fabulously rich duffers to be."

"I should say not! Was it an unexpected legacy, then?"

"Something in that line," with renewed uneasiness. "It's a sort of secret, though, Retta; a close secret, at that, though I may some day let you into it."

"And are you accustomed to carry such large sums with you?"

"Oh, yes—nowadays."

"Ah! well, if the source of your great wealth is a secret, Harvey, I already know enough of you to feel sure that it is a perfectly honest one, or else you could have no connection with it."

He started, though the trustfulness of the look that accompanied her words should have added to his self-satisfaction.

"Of course you're right there," he slowly replied, recovering himself. "I have just as honest and indubitable a right to my fortune as you or any one could have to lost money picked up out yonder along the roadside gullies."

"No, more than that?"

"What do you mean, Retta?"

"Why, how can you ask? Such money could not rightfully belong to the mere finder, but only to the loser, or original owner."

"To be sure, to be sure!" with a forced laugh. "I did but jest. But look you, Retta," anxiously shifting the topic, "you speak of wanting a start with your lesson-giving?"

"Yes," with new interest.

But at this juncture they were interrupted by a passing buggy, moving slowly northward, in which were two young men, of fashionable but rather dissipated appearance, both of whom looked hard, and even somewhat surprisedly, at the young woman, without taking any notice of her companion.

"Do you know those young men, Retta?" asked Harvey, when they had passed.

"I do not," she answered, yet turning slightly pale.

"Never see them before?"

"Never, to my recollection." This quite decidedly.

"Strange they should look at you so hard, then. Look! both are again twisting their heads around for a parting glimpse at you."

"That is nothing," said Retta, somewhat coldly. "Young gentlemen are often so rude nowadays."

"Especially when young ladies are so attractive as to appear little less than angels!"

And he gave a jealous little laugh.

"Pardon me; you were saying—"

"Oh, yes! Well, there are several fashionable, or half-fashionable, ladies at Mrs. Godlove's, where I board, who might want to try you on as a music-teacher. I'll pass the hint around, if you say so."

"Thank you! That may be worth thinking of."

"Oh, I'm sure you'll get a good start there, if even under my unassisted recommendation!" he cried, at once beginning to see everything rosily.

"There is the widow herself, to begin with. She has naturally a fine voice, but both sings and plays ignorantly; and I have more than once heard her lament her lack of cultivation. And then there is Therese Bertrande—La Travadeuse! I don't know, to be sure, whether she sings or plays, or even cares a rap for music. But," with a laugh, "if the widow would have you on my recommendation, so would La Travadeuse, and in hot haste, you may depend on it."

The young girl opened her brown eyes to their fullest extent.

"And who is the widow, and who is La Travadeuse?" she inquired.

Mayfield laughed again, besides blushing a little; and then he seemed to take a sudden resolution.

"It's a queer complication that they make of it with me—those extraordinary women!" said he, with a fresh burst of laughter. "But I don't want to have anything apart from you, my friend, so I shall tell you all about it from A to Izzard."

And so he did, then and there (always excepting any reference to the money secret), without reservation, and with such frank ingenuousness that she could not but smile with him at the eccentric comicalness of his situation.

"Was ever anything more ridiculous?" he cried, at last. "Don't I suggest to you a bundle of fresh clover between two—well, we will say two does? Or as a bone between a leopardess and an elderly Indian princess—for La Travadeuse often suggests the former to me, and there is something in her absolute unconscientiousness that sometimes makes me afraid of her."

Retta had suddenly grown very grave.

"It isn't right for a young man—this sort of thing," she said. "I would speedily break with both of them, if I were you, Harvey."

"Gad! so I would," with a really anxious look, "and none more gladly and readily—if I only knew how. However," with a sudden brightening up, "who knows but you may be able to help me in this, Retta?"

"Perhaps so." She held out her hand. "Good-by, now. Here is Mrs. Kelly opening up the front of the house."

"But you will let me call soon, to know how you are getting along with your new projects?"

"Yes."

He pressed her hand warmly, and went on his way, but almost immediately came running back.

"I had meant to ask you something," he cried breathlessly, "but forgot to."

"What is it?"

"Your name, Retta—so evidently a nickname—what is it an abbreviation of?"

She was graver than ever now.

"That must remain my secret," she replied, a little coldly. "As you have one that you keep from me, Harvey, so I shall keep this from you. Good-by," with a parting smile as she was retreating up the path, "and may God bless you!"

Mayfield hurried on, desirous of catching the seven o'clock up-train, and already anxious in his mind as to the best disposition of his sudden wealth, without exciting dangerous suspicions, especially on the part of Therese Bertrande.

As he was boarding the train he experienced a new indefinable sensation of uneasiness on perceiving two men curiously and critically regarding him from the station platform.

He recognized them as the same young men who had stared so hard at Retta Merrivale from the passing buggy.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN INTERRUPTION.

"Who can those fellows be, and what can they want?" thought the young man to himself, and his hand closed mechanically with a tighter clutch upon his grip-sack. "In driving hither they must have passed the treasure-cottage. And what could they have meant by staring so inquisitively at Retta?"

But here the train moved away with him, and, being both in love and troubled over the secret course he had laid out for the day, the thought of them quickly passed out of his mind.

But his troubles, or anxieties, were not slow in making a start.

He had scarcely breakfasted, after a careful toilette and complete change of clothing, than Mrs. Godlove, whose fashionable "guests" took their morning meal rather perfunctorily, with a high-toned disregard of any regular hour, followed him, timidly and yet half-reproachfully, to the foot of the stair.

"Mr. Mayfield, you—you were not home last night."

"Oh, yes, I was, ma'm—till eleven o'clock."

"But after that?" with motherly anxiety, in which both suspicion and reproof were mildly mingled.

At once suspicious, in his turn, that his skulking departure might have been noted and commented upon, he exclaimed, a little irritably:

"Well, what of it, ma'm? I suppose I am at liberty to go and come."

"Yes, yes; oh, yes!" and the pretty widow was almost tearful. "Would I dare to be anxious over your movements, Mr. Mayfield? Of what account am I?"

"But how were you aware of my not occupying my room later on?" wholly disregarding her solicitude.

"I was compelled to investigate, sir. You had a visitor."

A visitor at after eleven?"

"Nearer twelve." With a slightly quivering lip.

"What visitor?"

"Major Falconbridge."

Mayfield started back, and with difficulty mastered his alarm.

"What did he want?"

"How should I know, Mr. Mayfield. Detectives are not often communicative."

"But what did he say?"

"Nothing. But he seemed surprised and disappointed, and asked if you often slept away from home."

"Oho!"

"Yes. And I hope the major excused me if I manifested a little indignation in your behalf, Mr. Mayfield—Harvey," with a thrilling dropping of her voice. "But I stood up for you. I answered, with truth, that your hours were mostly unimpeachable, your habits, as a general rule, the most highly correct."

"Ah, thanks, thanks! Well, did he say he would call again?"

"He was uncertain. He had wished to see you last night on a most important matter. Another day might be too late."

He nodded, and was about hurrying up-stairs in no very enviable state of mind, when Mrs. Godlove timidly laid her plump hand on his arm.

"Mr. Mayfield!"

"Well, ma'm?"

"You haven't wholly given up your divinity studies and aspirations, I hope."

"What makes you suppose I have?"

"I do not see you with your once beloved books any more. Since she came, all is so changed."

"Oh!" with a nervous laugh, though perfectly willing that his transformation should be ascribed to any but the real cause. "Therese, as usual, eh?"

"Can you blame me? Prior to her coming, you—you were so kind, frequently so sympathetic, to me." With a regretful smile that parted her lips charmingly, and half-obliterated the provoking little crow's-feet about her handsome eyes. "However," resignedly, "but I suppose I am only an old woman now."

"Indeed, you are nothing of the sort," he interposed, impatiently. "But really you must excuse me now, my dear friend. I have pressing business that will occupy my entire day."

"Oh, don't let me detain you, for the world! Why should I? What," semi-tragically, "is left for poor me? All the happy, innocent times are changed. The church sociables, the sweet singing-classes I attended with you—all!"

He turns to her again, a sudden thought

causing him to restrain his impatience to be gone.

"Ah, I had forgotten. Truly, Mrs. Godlove, those singing classes were agreeable. You used to wish that you could subject your magnificent contralto voice and characteristic piano-playing to proper instruction."

"Yes."

"Well, I am reminded of a lady in Yonkers—a superb musician and instructress, I haven't a doubt—who might give you lessons to advantage."

"A young lady?"

"Well—ur—you'd scarcely call her old—say twenty or twenty-one, you know."

"Oh!" A little freezingly.

"An old friend, perhaps a sort of distant relation of mine, you see." How glibly the wayward fellow had come to misrepresent and prevaricate! "You see, in spite of her splendid attainments, she has never had much experience in transmitting them to others," he goes on easily. "Now I'll make a proposition to you, my dear friend. You engage lessons of her when she comes, at her own price, leaving me to reimburse you for the payments—but in strict secrecy, mind you, without permitting the remotest suspicion on her part. Understand, my dear, sweet Mrs. Godlove? The only thing I shall stipulate for from you will be that you introduce her to your lady guests and friends, with such recommendations as she shall prove herself worthy of. That will be a sort of starter in business for her. See?"

"Oh, yes, I see!" With renewed sadness and no little suspicion.

"Well, what do you say to it?"

Mrs. Godlove took his hand in both of hers, and somewhat tearfully pressed it.

"Her name, Mr. Mayfield?" she murmured. "The lady's, the young lady's name and address?"

"Miss Retta Merrivale; never mind the address, which is simply 'Yonkers' for the present; I will see that she visits you at an early day."

"Thank you, Harvey!" with trembling but proud humility. "You wish it; then I shall see Miss Merrivale. I shall try to be not ungrateful on her account, nor—anything else. What should it matter to a faded old woman like me?" (with streaming eyes, and temptingly red lips, like sunburnt ripe roses, quivering to be kissed) "even—even if yet another young beauty be rushed across the stage-boards of your heart?"

And, with a parting pressure of the coveted hand, the emotional landlady floated back disconsolately to her coffee-tray.

"Old Falcon again here, and last night of all others," muttered Mayfield, springing up the stairs three steps at a time. "This must be looked to. Expedition and caution are the cue."

But he only re-entered his room, with the intention of hurrying off with his money to the city banks without a moment of unnecessary delay, to be confronted by a fresh and yet more trying interruption.

"*A la bonne heure, cher ami—l'heure du berger!*"—["Well and good, darling friend—at love's own hour!"] called a musical voice—discordantly unwelcome at that moment, however—accompanied by a lazy puff of cigarette smoke.

La Travadeuse, of course. She still maintained her country residence, though giving nightly performances in the metropolis; coming and going with charming disregard of house rules and social conventionalities; and not infrequently taking possession of her handsome neighbor's room and best chair, as on the present occasion; though it was true that her curl-papers and *negligee* were a trifle more pronounced than usual just now.

Mayfield, thoroughly exasperated, barely constrained himself to bow politely, and then, flinging his hat into a corner, he plumped into a chair, stretched out his shapely legs, rammed his hands into his pockets, and gazed resentfully at the lovely intruder, with yet a wary weather eye upon the writing-table closet, or compartment, in which he had placed his money-stuffed grip-sack under lock and key.

She only looked over at him, and laughed in her light, reckless way.

"Bad boy! to be out of your own sweet little room and bed all night," she commented. "However, I shouldn't complain, *mon ami*. There was a small ocean of champagne after the performance last night, and I almost missed the up-train. That puts me in mind that I am dreadfully thirsty, Harvey. You will find my refreshener in the same place, my dear." And she tossed him a small key.

Shrugging his shoulders, he passed, without a word, around into the adjoining room (her own), whence he quickly returned with a large tumbler full of cracked ice, a decanter half filled with brandy and a bottle of English soda-water.

"Say when," he curtly enjoined, tilting out a generous dose of the spirits into the glass, which she had taken into her hand.

She motioned back the decanter with a little gesture of mock-horror, and then nodded gayly.

Pop went the soda, and the conventional Band S was a *fait accompli*.

"Cher ami, you are simply a darling!" She

handed him back the glass, and wiped her lips, after drawing a long, sighing breath. "Who has been tumbling your pretty hair for you?"

"What do you mean?" he demanded angrily, and once more resuming his moody, not to say truculent attitude, after summarily disposing of the glassware.

"You needn't be cross, you charming young bear, you!" airily. "But if I really thought the antediluvian Godlove had been patting your cheeks this morning, I'd break every bone in her ridiculous body. The matches are at your elbow, I believe." And a fresh cigarette began to evolve from the ends of her pretty fingers.

"Why do you continue in the country here?" abruptly demanded the young man, with an almost brutal indifference to what she had said, though condescending to toss a match in her lap. "I should think you would find it infernally inconvenient."

She lighted her cigarette composedly, and then fastened her superb eyes upon him with a curious look.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERÈSE IS PROVOKING.

"AHA! you should think that, should you?" she murmured. "Come, then, *cher ami*, we shall quit the country for New York quarters at your pleasure."

He returned her look with steady and angry interest.

"We, indeed!" he sneered.

"Just what I said, my dear. You have got it right."

Mayfield struck with his open palm a small table, on which he had set the bottles and glass, till they rattled and jumped.

"Therèse, there must be an end of this at once—now, from this time forth!" he exclaimed, decisively.

"An end of what, you dear, darling young donkey?" And she began to laugh immoderately. "Don't be enigmatical, and I will fondle your ears, like another Titania."

"You know what I mean perfectly well. If not for your own sake, for mine at least, you should be generous enough to make your home elsewhere—anywhere out of this house."

"You don't say it, *cher ami*?"

"I shall no longer tacitly give color to the false position in which you insist on placing me before the other boarders here—before the whole village, for that matter. I sha'n't stand it longer! There's got to be an end!"

"Diable! And what false position do I put you in, *mon pauvre petit*?"

"Don't pretend you don't know—it won't avail you! The false position of persistently making me appear what I am not, have never been, and never would be—in relation to the most fascinating woman that ever lived!" And his cheeks flamed.

"What might that be?"

"As your good companion—your lover! But of what avail for you to pretend an ignorance of my meaning? You must know of the impression that has been created."

"What of that?" And she laughed again snapping her fingers.

"What of it?" he echoed, furiously; "when you know the injustice of it, to me at least. Your lover! your—something which you know that, as a man of principle, I never have been, and never would be."

"Don't think that I am doubting your virtue, Monsieur Prudehomme!" with unmeasured contempt, and yet not without a furtive and devouring glance for his manly beauty. In France they might call you a *jocrisse*, in England—a milk-sop!"

But Mayfield was at last keeping his temper well in hand.

"Madame, I am about making a visit to the city," he said, politely. "Will you kindly vouchsafe me the privacy of my own room?"

"Not yet, *cher Harvee*. So!—let me see. You would gladly have me disassociated from you forthwith, eh?"

"It would be as well, ma'm."

"That the ancient Godlove may have you all to herself?"

"I decline to answer an insinuation that is an insult to a good woman."

"Ah! Well," with a searching look, "that you may uninterruptedly hunt up the treasure revealed to you by my convict progenitor, then?"

"You cannot," coolly, "believe in the existence of such treasure any more than I."

She smiled.

"How sad! This sudden coolness on your part, *mon ami*—"

"It is not so sudden, as you well know," he interrupted. "I have from the very first protested, either impliedly or otherwise, against the—the *bonne camaraderie* that you have so persistently endeavored to force upon me. You will not attempt to deny it, Therèse."

She flushed, but did not lose her somewhat dangerous smile.

"I was about to say that this rupture is unfortunate for me, as I was about to ask a little favor of you, my dear. However, I shall express my desire."

"Do so," with a quick breath of relief, as here,

seemingly, was a prospect of getting rid of her. "What can I do for you, Therèse?"

"A mere trifle! I want you to lend me a thousand dollars."

He looked at her aghast, but quickly recovered on seeing that she was watching him like a cat.

"You do, indeed, trifle," was his cold reply. "For I have never made any secret of my poverty to you."

She snapped her fingers.

"Pish! You were out all night treasure-seeking. Come, *cher ami*, I sha'n't go to law with you over the legacy; but a tenth or twentieth of your first haul is not such an immense demand for my share."

She had surmised cleverly, but Mayfield was not so foolish as to step into the cunning trap.

He arose, with a hard smile on his face, and an unmistakable air.

"Madame Bertrande, you have not yet breakfasted," he said, freezing. "Good solid food, without anything more to drink on an empty stomach, may tone up this flightiness, which I deeply regret."

"Maman!" called out a sleepy little voice from the adjoining room; "*est ce que tu a dejune?*"—"Have you breakfasted yet?"

"There!" he went on, with mock jocularity; "even your little grasshopper is hungry, if you are not, *ma belle*."

"Suppose you really had made the *coup* I suggested, monsieur, would you oblige me with the bagatelle I am in need of?"

"Ah, we are now in suppositions?"

"Yes."

"Well, even were I rich, my friend, my general determination would be unaltered."

"And what would that be?"

"Millions at the beck of deserving friendship, not one sou to blackmail!"

She sprung to her feet in an access of fury, that intensified her voluptuous beauty to that degree as almost made him regret the rupture.

"Fool! iceberg! handsome idiot!" she hissed between her teeth; "do not think to deceive me as to that money. It was at my miserable father's hands that you received the bequest, and I shall have my share, my full share!"

He bowed ironically.

"The whole—all of it—if it exists, and you can get it!" he smilingly replied.

She cast off her anger, as a garment, and, running up to him, threw her arms about his neck.

"You foolish boy!" she murmured, kissing him effusively; "to imagine that it is for money, for aught but your own darling self, that I care? But don't send me away altogether. I sha'n't annoy you any more: I shall be, oh, so very demure and discreet, if you will only love me a little." And she tripped out of his presence, throwing him kisses and melting looks as she disappeared.

But the mercenary depths of the woman's false and dangerous nature had been sufficiently revealed to complete whatever disenchantment the young man had needed, and that was not over-much.

Without further delay he snatched his hat and grip-sack and hurried away to the railroad station; with the detective's image once more in his mind, and filled with the dread of a yet more serious interruption.

But none occurred, and two hours later, in New York, he experienced the first real sensation of relief since quitting the hiding-place of the ill-gotten treasure.

He had opened accounts in two sterling National banks, with thirteen thousand dollars to his credit in each.

He had only retained a trifle over four thousand dollars for immediate casual and personal expenses, from which it will be seen that he was not absolutely intent upon a life of anchoretical self-denial or philosophical frugality.

But neither must it be imagined that unwonted prodigality was to be feared as a weakness in our fortunate young friend.

Directly after making his last deposit, he was met by a whilom intimate acquaintance, greatly down in his luck, who, encouraged by the other's smiling content, rather humbly requested assistance to the extent of twenty dollars.

"But, my dear fellow! do you take me for a millionaire?" exclaimed Mayfield, aghast. "Twenty dollars—a fortune in itself! What's your prime misfortune, anyway?"

There was more than one, it seemed. The poor devil had lost his regular employment. Then his wife had died. He was now living in a Bowery lodging-house, mostly drinking more than was good for him when not looking for work. He was feeling especially nervous and broken up to-day.

"Oh, you want a good, stiff pull-me-together, that is all!" cries Mayfield, slapping him on the back. "I can spare you this much—always ready to help a distressed old friend to the extent of my means, you know—and, if I can assist you to fresh employment, don't neglect to let me know."

And he jauntily continues on his way, after leaving the princely sum of a whole, large, round half-dollar in the poor fellow's trembling hands.

After a splendid lunch at the lower Del-

monico's, Mayfield strolled into one of the most fashionable of the down-town tailors, where he ordered three suits of expensive clothes, paying for them in advance.

"I must be economical at the start," he muttered, carefully buttoning from view a comfortably-packed new pocketbook of liberal dimensions. "And now for a visit of inquiry to my mysterious little angel, Retta Merrivale."

And, stepping out of the tailor-shop he almost ran into the arms of Major Jack Falconbridge, otherwise Old Falcon.

CHAPTER XV. OLD FALCON AGAIN.

"HALLO!" cried the detective.

"Ah!" was the rather breathless rejoinder. Nevertheless, Harvey responded with some warmth, not wholly hypocritical to the major's hearty hand-clasp, so unaffectedly grateful was he at having escaped the dreaded interview up to this point.

"I ran up to see you last night," said the detective. "Perhaps you have not been home since then?"

"Oh, yes; and Mrs. Godlove informed me of your having called. Deuced sorry, I am sure! She intimated it was something of importance."

"Yes," carelessly, "but perhaps it isn't so much so now."

Yet all the time Mayfield felt that he was not for an instant escaping the hawk-like scrutiny of the fierce, solemn eyes, at such odd variance with the smiling lips and facial *bonhomie* of the associative features.

"I am rather pressed for time just now, major," said he. "But can still spare you a few minutes."

"That will suffice, I fancy. There were two or three things to say. Of course, you remember Brummagem Bob's deathbed?"

"I should say so."

"Well, it wasn't a death-bed, after all."

"How?—a case of shamming? I would never have believed it."

"Neither would I. However, it wasn't so bad as that. He simply got well—convalesced from the very jaws of death, and most unexpectedly. I interviewed him in the prison yesterday, or rather tried to. He's dumber as a live man than he was as a half-dead one."

"I am not surprised at that," indifferently.

"Anything else, major?"

"Yes, last week I visited the dead man's remaining pal, Centerbit Grayton, in the New Jersey State Prison."

Half-weariedly: "Ah, yes; there was another one, now that you recall it to mind."

The detective eyed him yet more keenly, not to say disappointedly.

"Grayton was equally non-communicative," he went on. "But he flew into a terrible passion, and his alarm was most manifest, when I recounted the strange circumstances attendant upon Burkitt's death—chiefly anent the buried plunder, of course."

"Oh, the deuce! that again?" with no little impatience.

"Hold on! There is yet more, Mr. Mayfield. My clients, the curious Jacob and Joseph Mervyn, imagine they have got a clew to the vanished heiress, Miss Henrietta Mervyn."

"Still alive, eh?"

"They think, or rather fear, as much, since her reappearance would, of course, cook their hopes for the missing treasure."

"Why should they be hunting up clews of her, then?"

The detective laughed.

"I suppose they go on the principle that there is nothing like being sure of one's right to a fortune beforehand."

"They might better first make sure that there is a fortune."

"Ah, you really think so? Well, again, they may think it worth while to unearth the heiress, and perhaps marry her, on the risk."

"True, if polyandry were legally admissible."

"Of course, but one cousin could marry the girl at a time," said the detective, laughing. "But the oddest thing is that they imagine they have tracked the missing heiress somewhere up along your way."

"Ah, indeed!" with yet more exasperating listlessness.

"Yes; she was last indistinctly heard of as an obscure operative in some one or another of the river towns. The young men have been pursuing their inquiries, rather hopelessly, to be sure, for a week or more."

Mayfield made his impatient gesture.

"But, my dear sir," he asked, with a fatigued smile, "in what way can all this concern me?"

"Why, as the possessor of the treasure secret, you know—"

But here the young man, with a last wearied gesture, was turning abruptly away amid the crowded street (for the conversation was taking place on Broadway,) when Old Falcon peremptorily caught him by the arm.

"One moment, and one question, if you please?" he demanded, with unwonted sternness.

"Let it be brief, then," returned the other, half-angrily. "There is a limit to endurance."

"My question is this: If you were the master

of the stolen treasure's secret—even if you may not have already appropriated some of the funds—would you, or would you not, deem yourself in honor bound to make known the discovery to the ruined banker's sole legal heir, Miss Henrietta Mervyn, upon her coming to light with the presentation of her claim?"

Mayfield drew himself up with a haughtiness that did not misbecome him.

"Sir, if you will put your hypothetical question in a less offensive form," said he, coldly, "I may condescend to answer it."

"How? Oh, I see. Well, then, pray consider my suppositional question *per se*, without the parenthetical clause which has touched you, I see, on the raw."

"It touched my honor, if that is what you so elegantly term the raw."

"I crave an answer to my question in its original substance, Mr. Mayfield."

"You shall have it. I would consider myself absolutely in honor and conscience bound to make known the discovery under the circumstances that you mention. Otherwise, I should be no true man, despicable in honorable eyes, hopelessly debased in self-contempt."

There was something simply and unassumingly noble in the enunciation of these words; for it must be remembered that the speaker, under the impression that there was small likelihood of their ever being put to the test, thoroughly believed in them himself.

"Sir, I thank you," said the detective. "I will even go further and add that I almost trust you."

For all that, he followed the tall, graceful figure of the young man, as it was disappearing in the hurrying and mobile crowd, with something discontented and unsatisfied in that piercing, searching gaze of his.

We will accompany the detective as he turned on his heel, and made his way to his dingy little cock-loft of an office in a near-at-hand building, while muttering to himself:

"Well, now for my two rascals, in place of the Tarrytown Adonis; if indeed he be a rascal, which I have yet to make sure of."

As he entered his office, two young men—the same who had looked so inquisitively at Retta Merrivale, and whose subsequent scrutiny had so puzzled Harvey Mayfield at the Yonkers railway station—who were smoking and lounging expectantly in the only unbroken arm-chairs available, looked up and nodded lazily.

"So, gentlemen," and the detective smilingly contented himself with a dilapidated office-stool for his own accommodation, "you are here before me, I see. I hope I haven't kept you long waiting."

"Yes, you have," vouchsafed the elder and better favored of the cousins, Jacob Mervyn, yawning. "However, it doesn't matter so much," with a meaningless oath.

"Not a deuced bit," said Joseph, likewise with a gape. "I say, maje, is there such a thing as a snifter of brandy or rum stowed away anywhere in this beastly den of yours?"

"No, there isn't; understand that, once for all," was the short and quieting response, with a steely suggestiveness of tone with which both young men had become more or less familiar. "So you couldn't make anything of the clew I put you on."

"Clew be blowed!" ejaculated Jacob contemptuously. "The girl isn't in the land of the living. We're more satisfied of that than ever before."

"You bet!" supplemented Joseph. "We only came to tell you so, old fel. However, you're not to blame for putting us on the wrong scent."

"No, we don't blame you, maje," continued Jacob. "Ta-ta! You know where to find us should you light on anything worth considering, you know."

And they both took their departure in the lazy, loose-jointed manner of youths confirmed in ruinous habits and irregular lives.

"I feel you lie, and I know you lie!" muttered the detective, looking at the door they had closed behind them as if he would bore through it with his glittering eyes. "However, you two will bear watching about as well as any pair of profligate scoundrels that I know of."

He made a dive into a sort of *cabinet particulier*, which was partitioned off from the rest of the office.

When he reappeared, in a marvelously brief space of time, it was in the guise of a rather dudish young man-about-town, beneath which his best friend would not have recognized his actual identity.

Then he was on the street in a flash, almost before the young men had well quitted the building, and he was also fairly at their heels when, after a brief, aimless walk, they entered a billiard and beer saloon of a rather low character in a side-street west of Broadway.

CHAPTER XVI. NEPHEWS OF THE DECEASED.

As the young men seated themselves at the only unoccupied round table in the saloon, and signaled for beer, doubtless with the intention of engaging in private conversation, the disguised detective stolidly took the remaining

seat at the same table, and beckoned to a waiter with an excess of mute pantomime that might have appertained to a deaf and dumb man.

Then he pointed out several articles on the bill of fare, and was presently supplied with Russan *caviare*, rye bread and butter, and a *schoppen* of Rhein wine and seltzer, which, after a dainty arrangement of his eye-glasses and a napkin, he proceeded to discuss at leisure, with apparently no interest whatever in his surroundings.

"Deaf-mute, think you, Jake?" queried the younger, in an undertone.

"Dunno," growled the other. "Maybe only a fresh." And, leaning across the table, he addressed some not over-polite commonplace to the seeming exquisite.

No attention being evoked, he touched him on the arm, whereupon the other looked up amiably.

"I beg your pardon, but did you do me the honor to address me, sir?" asked the latter, adjusting his *pincenez*, holding his knife and fork in suspension, and speaking in a peculiarly hushed, muffled, and far-away voice.

The young men both nodded, rather surlily, in response.

"You will then excuse my apparent rudeness in not answering, I trust," the *caviare*-eater went on, with increased good-humor. "You will understand that I could not have heard you. Though a long course of instruction has enabled me to command the use of my vocal organs—they tell me I do pretty well at it," with a proud little smile, "though of course I must remain a stranger to whatever my voice may accomplish—what is meant by noise or sound must continue an unknown mystery to me. I was born a deaf-mute, as you will have doubtless guessed."

Here he dropped his knife and fork to produce a white slate and pencil, which he politely extended across the table.

"Write something that'll choke him off," growled Joseph, with the oath that seemed customary to his language. "Otherwise the blamed jackass may think we're interested in him."

Thereupon Jacob lazily scribbled on a slate: "The remark made to you was of no consequence. Sorry for your misfortune."

The pretended deaf-mute nodded gravely, returned the slate and pencil to his pocket and resumed his bread and *caviare* as unconcernedly as before, while from that moment the young men spoke together unreservedly.

They were rather good-looking young fellows of twenty-seven and eight, tall, well-proportioned and naturally of vigorous mold; but the effects of reckless and unprincipled lives were apparent alike in their heavy, dissipated looks, their careless, unconventional manners, and a certain loudness in their dress, which was, nevertheless, of fashionable cut and expensive material.

"Do you think we did perfectly right in hoodwinking that bloke of a detective?" said one.

"Of course. What show would we have at his hands, were he aware that Henrietta was brought to light."

"But she wouldn't be able to promise him more than we, in the event of the stolen funds being found. Gad! nor so much either. We can at least afford him some axle-grease out of our beastly little annuities and faro winnings. But she—if really identical with the pretty operative that we spotted, which is yet to be made sure of—she shouldn't be able to offer him a rap. He would have to undertake the entire treasure-search as a pure speculation."

"You haven't judged Old Falcon right. That might not make any difference with him. He is a conscientious man."

This seemed so comical to Joseph, the younger and more depraved appearing of the cousins, who had been the listener, that he fairly rolled in his seat, laughing till the tears gushed out of his weak, blinking eyes, and only recovered upon burying his nose in a second tankard of beer.

"You'll excuse my smiling, Jake, I hope," he managed to blurt out at last. "Conscientiousness in a detective! Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! Come, Jake, I like that. It's demnitition rich!"

"It's none the less true," persisted the other, with a frown attesting to its unpalatableness notwithstanding. "Old Hawk considers us as rascals, and has been keeping a secret watch on us accordingly from the very first. Should the question ever fairly offer itself to him as between us and little Hetty Mervyn—the true and only heir, whom neither of us has clapped eyes on since she was a baby (unless the pretty operative of early this morning, whom we saw talking with that young Mayfield chap, should prove the same)—he'd throw us over with no more compunction than if we were a pair of wharf-rats in the wrong ship's hold."

Joseph also knitted his brows now.

"If I thought that!" He clinched his hand, a look that was not good to see coming into his face. "But are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Joe. Old Falcon is widely reputed as one of the few detectives who have achieved wonderful successes, without incur-

ring so much as a whispered taint of dishonest collusion or double-dealing with crime."

"Why, the man has an eye like a hammer-geyer's. Who would suspect him of being so soft?"

"But we're drinking mighty little of this prime beer, I notice," said Jacob, and, hammering on the table, he ordered the glasses replenished.

"I say," observed the other, "we have done precious well, then, in keeping our detective in the dark, eh?"

"I should say we had."

"Shall we go up to Yonkers to-night, to make sure as to the gal's identity?"

"Why not? I had thought of trying for my revenge out of Hughes's roulette-board to-night, but that will keep over."

"While the gal might not, eh?"

"Just so."

"It is agreed, then."

"Yes."

"More beer, waiter!—Now another thing, Jake."

"I thought you'd be coming to it." And the other smiled.

"Of course. This is the next wrinkle, ain't it? Our best course in the event of our suspicions proving correct?"

"Certainly. But there is scarcely a doubt as to her identity in my mind. She's the living image of her father—Old Nunksy Hop, as we called him when boys, before he quarreled with our fathers—though in such a ravishing mold. Better go on that supposition from this time forth."

"Taken for granted for the moment, then, that the working-girl we saw this morning is our cousin, Henrietta Mervyn, so disguised, what then?"

"It won't do to let her know that there is still hope of her fortune being recovered?"

"Not by a long shot! She must still imagine herself penniless, friendless, despairing."

"Well, and good. What then?"

Joseph drew a long breath, while his weak eyes twinkled.

"I have a brilliant idea."

"What is that?" demanded Jacob.

"One of us must marry the girl."

"My thought, at the same instant, to a T! Marry her, eh, and then go halves with the non-marrying other, in case of the fortune coming to light?"

"Exactly. There is but one question as to success in the marrying scheme."

"Two, if you please, Joe."

"What are they?"

"The question as to the girl's consent being procurable, and as to whether that divinity chap having already become her lover."

"True, the latter possibility had not occurred to me. Let's see, he is the man whose name was in the newspapers in connection with the convict's sensational death?"

"That is so."

"How could he have struck up her acquaintance, think you?"

"Doubtless by mere chance. Tarrytown is but a short distance north of Yonkers, you must remember. But don't let's consider him at present."

"All right. He can be disposed of, if necessary, later on."

"Now then comes the prime question of all."

"Precisely. As to which of us two shall do the marrying?"

"That's it. Now, to tell the truth, I shouldn't mind sacrificing myself in the double cause. The girl's beauty rather took my fancy."

"That's odd, Jake. But she rather took my fancy, too."

Then they looked at each other, burst out laughing, and added more beer, with cigars.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GAME OF BILLIARDS.

PRESENTLY a fresh, brilliant idea seemed to strike the younger of the precious cousins brace.

"I have it!" he exclaimed.

"What is it you have got?" inquired Jacob.

"The way out of our difficulty—to decide as to which of us shall marry the girl."

"Oho! But, if you'll excuse me for speaking out in meeting, Joe, I don't fancy you would have a ghost of a chance for success in that quarter, under any circumstances."

"The deuce you don't!" And the ugly look showed itself again in Joseph's face. "Why not?"

"Well, even from the brief glimpse I got of her, she struck me as probably being a young woman of penetration and force of character."

"Well?"

"And you've got such—such sore eyes, you know, and such a generally petered-out look, so to speak."

But Joseph's eyes were not too sore to blaze ominously at the flattering personality.

"One wouldn't imagine you so polite, Jake, from your generally boorish and loutish appearance," he sneered.

"Indeed! But you mustn't be over-complimentary, Joe. It mightn't pay."

And Jacob's face was reflecting the other's frown with interest.

"Besides," continued Joseph, maliciously, "you, as a matter of course, would be out of the competition on—ur—strictly moral grounds, you know."

"Moral grounds' is good! But I don't know anything of the sort, Joe Mervyn. What do you mean?"

"Why, you're already married to that bartender's divorced wife up in Harlem—report says so, at all events."

"Then report is an infernal liar!" exclaimed Jacob, with an oath, and yet moving uncomfortably in his chair.

"But Jenny once told me so herself."

"Then Jenny is a liar, too; and I'll take it out of the minx's hide at the first opportunity! I wouldn't marry her if she'd go on her knees and beg for it, even with the kid in her arms—the devil fly away with her!"

"Well, well; no harm's done, then. No need of going into convulsions over it."

"But you shouldn't throw up an idle rumor as a fact to me, Joe. It isn't the fair thing."

"And you might, with equal reason, leave my optical infirmity to look out for itself. And, moreover, I've stood fast living as well as you, and am visibly no more 'petered out' than you."

"Pshaw! don't let us quarrel, Joe. We can't afford it."

"Good, then! Now to return to my original idea."

"Let's see; what was the proposition?"

"To decide which of us should first pay court to the girl, with a view to the matrimonial racket."

"Well, how do you propose we shall decide it?"

"By a game of billiards—now and here—a hundred points up—four-ball carom!"

Jacob's eyes glistened, as billiards were one of his strong points; though Joseph was also a powerful player.

"It's a bargain!"

A carom table chanced to be vacant a few moments later; a marker was secured in the proprietor, with whom both young men seemed well acquainted; off went their coats, and the game began.

The disguised detective changed his seat for a more desirable one, and, masking his interest by a pretended examination of a file of illustrated journals, calmly watched and waited the result of the game.

The young men at the outset assumed a half-jocular interest, as if each was trying to deceive the other with regard to the momentousness of the affair; but they speedily relinquished such hypocrisies, and were breathlessly absorbed in the contest for the mastery, both playing for all they were worth.

As has been intimated, both were expert players—were something more than amateur proficients, in fact.

The play soon became exceptionally brilliant, and, as the impression somehow got out that it was not only for a hundred points, but also for an unusual stake in secret, the table was soon the center of a large group of connoisseurs, hangers-on and miscellaneous onlookers.

At last Joseph finished a cautiously brilliant run of eighteen, and drew back with a confident smile on his face, haggard with suppressed nervous excitement, for it put him sixteen points ahead, and the game was already well along.

His string showed eighty-six; his opponent's but seventy.

Jacob's superior physique, however, was best standing the nervous strain, and there was not a tremor in the practiced hand with which he coolly grasped his cue.

Joseph's break had, moreover, left the balls in an easy position for his successor.

The latter, however, made calculations for accomplishing too much at a stroke, took a painstaking aim, and—missed.

Joseph's smile broadened, and, with scarcely an effort, he added ten more to his string.

He required but four points to call "Game!" while his opponent required thirty.

"I rather think I've got you, old fellow," remarked Joseph, quietly chalking his cue.

Jacob looked calmly savage, but made no reply.

Neither did he make anything with his shot—another miss; and a most unusual thing, two misses in succession with so excellent a player.

"He's losing heart," was the general impression of the spectators. "He's a goner."

But here Joseph missed in his turn, and there was yet a chance for his opponent.

Jacob scored a paltry run of five, and then broke up miserably.

There was breathless suspense.

Joseph counted three points, as if they were so many Kohinoor diamonds, so elaborately painstaking was his play, and then went into the air on the easiest carom that had offered.

Still he could well afford to smile, notwithstanding that the perspiration was streaming down his pale face.

Ninety-nine to seventy-five!

Jacob chalked his cue with something deadly and iron-like in his grimness, and called for a glass of brandy.

Draining the spirits at a gulp, he set to work like an automaton.

Click, click, click! counted the caroms in steadily growing succession.

Fifteen, and the balls well left for nursing.

He drank yet another brandy, and went on with his run; a silence meantime prevailing in which a pin could have been heard to drop—and not necessarily a ten-pin either.

Click, click, click!

His nerve and skill seemed to have returned to stay, and he was continuing the run with the remorselessness of fate.

Joseph was growing whiter and more perspiring every instant.

He glanced wildly at the wires.

What! with only that one counter between him and victory, was the prize—the modest beauty of the young woman's image rose before him with a tantalizing, an exasperating radiance—to be ruthlessly clicked away from him at last?

At that instant his jealous hatred of his cousin (their friendship had never been more than skin deep at the best) was such that he could have murdered him in cold blood in the most hilarious good-humor.

Click, click, click!

The big-paunched German proprietor, who was acting as marker, was now calling out the points aloud.

"Twenty-one!" Click—"twenty-two!" Click—"twenty-three!" Click—"twenty-four!"

Then a pause. But one more to go, and yet with the balls scattered most unfortunately.

Joseph compresses his lips, twirls his sickly mustache, and tries not to gasp audibly. Jacob smiles feebly over his set teeth, but his eye has the veteran gambler's steely glitter, and his hand is like a rock.

He grasps his cue.

A sigh of relieved suspense from the bystanders, a harsh, forced laugh from Joseph accompanied by a poorly masked glance of disappointment and concentrated hatred from Joseph's red-edged and blinking eyes.

A superb, chance-taking, all-around-the-table shot—carom, and the game!

"I'll stand the dinners, old fellow," the pseudo deaf-mute exquisite overhears Jacob say, while the young men are putting on their coats. "That will leave us time for the seven-thirty train. Where shall it be?"

"Oh, anywhere! The Hotel Brunswick is good enough for me," returns the defeated competitor, with assumed indifference; and they go out together.

Two or three hours later, when the worthy nephews of the deceased ruined banker, Hopkins Mervyn, took their seats in the smoking-car of a Hudson River train, with cigars alight, flushed faces, and other indications of having both dined and wined regardless of expense, a rather stupid, loutish-looking old countryman, in coarse homespun, a slouched hat and blue-goggle spectacles, with ample suggestiveness of the regulation amount of hayseed in his ill-kempt gray hair, stumbled into the seat directly behind them, and to all appearances went off into a softly-breathing, hard-earned state of somnolency without a moment's delay.

"Do you suppose that cottage was the girl's residence, at whose gate we saw her with the young fellow this morning?" Joseph presently asked, soon after the train started.

"It is most likely," was the response. "It was a poor and yet neat-looking hole—just such as a mill operative, we will say with a refined sense of past better days," with a confident smile, "might choose to bury herself away in."

"It strikes me that way, too. I suppose we'd better call on her together first, so as to make sure of her identity."

"Ye-e-s. And yet, since I'm to do the after-work (finger of fate, you know, my boy,) there won't be any special call for your presence, at all. Sort of a fifth wheel to the picnic equipage, you know."

"No, I don't. The deuce you say! Suppose, for instance, the girl should turn out to be somebody else—no cousin or heiress whatever, but just her own, real unromantic work-a-day and poverty-stricken self, as her garb and general appearance indicated."

Jacob smiled, and made sure of his necktie and its associative diamond. Naturally a handsome man, he seemed to have taken on a new atmosphere of gayety and assurance.

"Well, what of it?" he asked, nonchalantly.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"RETTA."

JOSEPH MERVYN gave his cousin a searching under-lidded look of conjoined envy, suspicion and malevolence.

"Do you mean to intimate, Jake," with a contemptuous laugh, "that you would go in for the matrimonial racket, heiress or no heiress?"

"Ah, that would depend, my boy. The girl's face haunts me yet—she was pretty enough to eat! I might and I might not, you see."

"We never thoroughly know our best friends any more than we understand ourselves!" sighed

Joseph, with hypocritical concern. "I wouldn't have supposed you so mushy, Jake."

"Ah, indeed! Put yourself in my place then, and imagine the same question to be put to you."

"How is that?"

"Well, suppose yourself in my shoes, as about to tackle the girl's heart, and it should turn out responsive to the divine thrill, you know, but without a dollar in the world, or even any educational superiority, as a backing—just her own dear, beautiful, poverty-stricken, work-a-day self, according to your own words. What would you do?"

"I'm blessed if I know!" replied Joseph, with his customary oath, and no little confusion. "The young woman is a beauty, and no mistake."

"Ah! then I don't seem to monopolize the mushiness of character, it would seem."

Joseph burst into his false, insincere laugh.

"Well, I shall see you fairly launched, old fellow, any way," he chuckled. "I shall insist on that."

"Have your own way, then; though it may cost you more of a pang than you bargain for."

"I'll risk it."

The dusk of the summer evening had deepened when Yonkers was reached, so that when the cousins alighted from the train, the sleepy countryman (whom the reader will already have recognized as Old Falcon in a fresh disguise,) who was close behind, was enabled to dog their footsteps with a considerable degree of security.

The young men only paused a few moments for a reviver at an adjacent bar-room (indeed, they seemed unable to do much of anything without a frequent recourse to liquor or tobacco,) and then proceeded directly south along the road that ran past the cottage where Retta Merrivale lodged and boarded, and thence down in the metropolitan Annexed District, past the haunted, or treasure-concealing house, as it might be called, two miles further on.

"How different our outlook now," commented Jacob, thoughtfully, "to what it was prior to our accidentally setting eyes on the girl's face, so early this morning!"

"Curse that week's buggy-riding up and down these infernal hills from town to town!" growled Joseph. "It makes me sore again to think of it. We owe our detective a good one for that discomfort."

"And yet we are doubtless the gainers by it, as he predicted we would be. And aren't we evening up on him pretty well as it is, by leaving him in the lurch as to our discovery?"

"He, he, he! I should say so. I say, Jake—another happy thought!"

"Go ahead."

"Why not cut Old Falcon dead from this time on, and refuse to shell out another dollar at his demand, even on traveling expense account?"

"Not to be thought of."

"Why?"

"You forget that the hidden treasure is but an unsubstantiated dream, as yet."

"No, I don't. But, with the heiress once fairly in our power, what is to prevent our materializing that, without his co-operation, as easily as we shall doubtless get along without him concerning the gal herself?"

"It won't do, I tell you. We'd no more unearth the stolen hoard, without his professional aid, than we'd materialize the alleged buried doublets of Captain Kidd. Besides—"

"Besides what?" for Jacob had come to a very abrupt pause.

"It won't do to antagonize such a man as Falconbridge openly. That is what I meant to add. He is a bad man to trifle with, and has, moreover, both a fighting and killing record behind him."

"And what's to prevent our being bad men, too, on occasion—if we're not so already?"

"Pish! What were such soft-handed, half-tough sports as you and me to a man like Old Falcon—the prize desperate man, no less than the coolest card, of the private detective force of the Atlantic States."

"Speak for yourself, if you please!" contemptuously growled the younger cousin, who was in reality possessed of the most courage, in the brutish, black-blooded sense, of the two. "If I thought it likely the detective would ever be at serious cross-purposes with me, I'd knock him on the head in a blind alley, or stab him in the back, at the first opportunity, with no more compunction than if he were a Hottentot."

"Oho! as you would do any other man, myself included, under like circumstances, eh?" And Jacob threw a glance, that contained as much suspicion as jest, at his companion through the thickening dusk.

Joseph laughed forcedly, and threw away his cigar, for they were now approaching the proximity of the garden-gate.

"The deuce, Jake!" he grumbled; "don't chaff on such a serious subject."

"Maybe grain with the chaff, my boy! The jury let you off on it, but many others doubted your self-defense plea after you had pounded Roulette Ralph to death when you were scarcely of age. And as for Hughes's gamekeeper,

who disappeared so suddenly on that fishing excursion with you only two summers back!"

"Have done, I tell you!" warned the other, in a hoarse, changed voice.

He had come to a sudden pause under a street-lamp, and was gripping his companion fiercely by the shoulder.

Their shadower, the disguised detective, took the occasion to slip over to the opposite sidewalk, which was the more secluded of the two.

"Truly a precious pair of knaves!" he muttered to himself. "How long, I wonder, before one is assassinated by the other, after this hymeneal conspiracy of theirs shall have been fairly under way? But I must provide against this. A pity to have the gallows cheated in either case!"

As the evening was hushed, and the road comparatively deserted, he could still overhear the young men's conversation.

"The deuce! how touchy you are, Joe," exclaimed Jacob, breaking from his companion's grasp, and speaking in a soothing voice, as the pair once more resumed their walk. "Can't a fellow jest with you, without your flying into such a rage?"

"I'll jesting on some subjects!" muttered the other, though in a modified tone. "However, let it go— Softly! isn't that the young lady at the yard-gate now?"

"Yes, or very like. And the fellow with her has the divinity cut. Easy now. He is about separating from her."

The two figures at the gate were just distinguishable from one another, but little more than that.

The cousins had come to a pause, a little withdrawn to one side, whence they could still keep the observed pair in view; while the detective was occupying a yet better point of observation on the opposite side of the roadway.

A moment later the shadowy young man at the gate was seen to possess himself of the shadowy young woman's hand, and raise it—respectfully and yet adoringly, it might be presumed—to his lips.

Then, though the hand was quickly and even abruptly withdrawn, the young woman's raised voice, a very musical one, was heard in an apparently joyous reply to something said by her companion in a lower tone. After that two light laughs were blended, and with a blithe wave of the hand, the separation was effected; the young woman remaining at the gate to look after the retreating figure of her late companion, who, going directly toward the watchers, frequently turned his head to look back.

It was indeed Mayfield. He looked hard at the two men in passing, though without recalling their dimly-seen faces, and then moved unsuspectingly on, too happy in his second interview with the object of his abrupt attachment to think or care for anything else just then.

"If yonder young lady is indeed our lost heiress, which I now see no reason to doubt," thought Old Falcon, who had lost nothing of the pantomime or the recognition, "by what strange fatality can Harvey Mayfield, the felon's legatee, so to speak, have made her acquaintance—doubtless without suspecting her identity? I somehow suspect a secret visit on his part may have had something to do with it. These odd fatalities often go double. But the second game is once more afoot."

And, flitting noiselessly over the roadway, he was once more dogging the heels of the cousins, who were now sauntering on toward the cottage-gate; even managing to conceal himself within earshot as the elder of the pair ventured to accost its occupant.

"If it should prove that I am laboring under a misapprehension, miss," said Jacob Mervyn, with real courtliness of bearing, "I hope you will pardon the liberty I venture upon in addressing you."

Retta, with the utmost composure, motioned him to proceed; but at his next half-dozen words she decisively interrupted him by saying:

"It is evident that you are mistaken, sir. I am quite sure that I do not know you, and that you cannot know me."

CHAPTER XIX.

RETTA IN THE TOILS.

"THAT is unfortunate, miss—very!" continued the young man, in a deeply disappointed tone. "However, may I ask you if you remember us—my friend here and myself—passing you at this gate, and looking at you curiously, at an early hour of this morning? We were driving at the time."

"I do remember you now!" and her voice had a yet more decided ring in it; "but not your looking at me. It was a stare, and a very impudent one at that."

Jacob was profuse in his explanations and apologies, in which Joseph eagerly joined.

They were both very gentlemanly.

In a short time Retta, thoroughly convinced that she had been mistaken for some one else whom the young men were painfully anxious to find—a fictitious half-sister, Miss Smith, who had mysteriously disappeared from her Connecticut home, through an unfortunate love affair, or family misunderstanding, it was not certainly known which—was made such polite amends

that, being naturally kind-hearted, was willing enough to be lenient in the matter.

Still more, as her musical aspirations were inadvertently made apparent, she was not long in growing positively interested.

Did she have a piano? No; access to an instrument being only occasionally allowed her through the kindness of a well-to-do lady of the neighborhood.

Joseph could especially appreciate the deprivation.

He was a professional instructor of the piano, no less than of singing, while Jacob, the latter lost no time in delicately conveying this impression was one of his favorite pupils, besides being a young man of aesthetic tendencies and independent fortune.

What a pity there was not a piano-forte convenient! The engaging strangers might then interchange musical civilities with Miss Merrivale, besides, perhaps, giving her some valuable pointers with regard to her projects. There was one, however, and a good instrument too, they remembered, in the parlor of a pretty riverside hotel not far away. Sad that the trio were not better acquainted! when a temporary adjournment thither might not only be in order, but thoroughly enjoyable—quite a little musical treat, in fact.

Retta was a young woman whose distrust could speedily be displaced where her refined instincts were aroused, and the young gentlemen were educated, respectful, even shrinkingly delicate in their conversation and demeanor.

Besides, she knew of the hotel alluded to as being an eminently proper, and even somewhat exclusive public house.

In less than half an hour the trio were better acquainted—considerably so, it would seem.

It even ended in her accepting the young men's invitation to accompany them to the music-room of the inn, on their cheerfully accorded condition that her landlady, Mrs. Kelly, should be one of the party.

"Our missing heiress is found," said the secretly observant detective to himself. "But I must see the end of this."

Retta had run back to the cottage. She quickly returned, accompanied by Mrs. Kelly—a dumpy little shrewd-faced Irishwoman of middle age, who had little to say, but made up for her reticence by a most industrious use of her eyes and her judgment, and the party went off together in high good spirits, the detective tagging secretly on behind.

The hotel was but a short distance away, and, fortunately for them, the young men had made a somewhat favorable impression with the proprietor on a previous occasion.

It was yet more fortunate for them that, in the musical way, they had made no pretensions beyond their capacity.

Joseph was in reality a fine performer on the piano, while Jacob was the possessor of a trained tenor voice that had long been the envy and admiration of his associates, though chiefly exercised in circles the reverse of desirable.

The scene in the inn parlor was accordingly what had been promised—a musical treat.

Joseph played magnificently, and Jacob warbled like a bulbul in the enchanted gardens of Gulistan.

Then Retta both played and sung, receiving such discreet commendations, combined with an intelligent and valuable criticism, such as her betrayal of the lack of recent practice would have naturally called forth from disinterested but kindly superiority, as appealed to both her musical appreciation and her self-respect.

Then she and Jacob sang together, their voices harmonizing deliciously.

The evening ended enjoyably by the young men saying good-night at the cottage gate, with a timidly expressed hope of being permitted to call again, a request that was evaded rather than acceded to or denied.

But hardly had the agreeable visitors taken themselves off before Mayfield reappeared, with a face whose frowns were not lost upon the watchful detective, the latter having decided it unnecessary to follow up the Mervyn young men any further for that night.

Mayfield had missed his train, and, strolling back to the cottage, had secretly witnessed the musical adjournment, and even been, together with the detective, a private attendant thereon.

He at once strode up to Retta, still lingering at the gate, and demanded an explanation in such ill-considered and jealous terms as aroused her momentary indignation.

A violent quarrel, chiefly on the young man's part, ensued, which terminated by Retta following her landlady into the house, with pained and offended air, and Mayfield striding angrily away, not in the direction of the station, but down the river-road.

"If he should only be making for his treasure-hole now!" exclaimed Old Falcon, to himself. "Men so often rush to their money when angered in their love."

And with that he was upon the young fellow's track as silently as his own shadow in the moonlight.

But the detective was doomed to disappointment this time, though not at fault in his surmise.

It had been the intention, or rather the instinct, of the young man to seek relief from his stormy feelings by a stroll in the direction of the haunted cottage, perhaps with the idea of entering or at least obtaining a soothing glimpse of it. But at less than half the distance his heated emotions cooled, and, after a moment's hesitation, he began to retrace his steps.

"What a crazy fool I am!" he muttered, stamping his foot. "What right had I to address Retta in the tone I did, without even waiting for an explanation? But what could it mean—her sudden taking up with those two chaps? It is maddening! But she cannot go back on her promise to offer her lessons at Mrs. Godlove's day after to-morrow, when she may think somewhat better of me."

He had the bad habit of soliloquizing aloud, and presently went on again:

"And to think! here was I just about revisiting the fateful house in which I so tragically first met her last night under those horrible circumstances! when if she should so much as suspect the source of the money I forced her to accept of me, as a loan, it would be all up with me." He groaned, or sighed, the shadowing detective couldn't exactly make out which, though losing not a syllable of the muttered words. "Yes; she is honesty's soul. She would renounce me and my love as so much contamination, I fear, did she but dream—'Sdeath! the escaped convict was my evil genius on that never-to-be-forgotten morning. I almost wish that he had kept his accursed secret to himself!"

The cat footed detective only relinquished his shadowy attendance upon the young man—which the heavily shaded streets had in a great measure facilitated—when the station esplanade was reached.

He then paused in front of a saloon, while Mayfield hurried on for the up-train, which was just entering the station; and was turning over in his mind the surreptitious fragments of information that had been vouchsafed him, when an incident occurred to divert, or rather recall, his thoughts in another direction.

The door of the saloon was suddenly opened, affording egress to the Mervyn worthies, who had been drinking within pending the arrival of a down-train, and who were evidently much dissatisfied with each other.

"You had no business to make yourself so agreeable with the lady!" said Jacob, furiously. "It wasn't fair. I'm to do the captivating, not you. That was the compact."

"Still, she is my cousin as much as yours, Jake. Make allowances for family ties. Blood will tell."

"It sha'n't in this case!"

"Sha'n't it?" muttered Joseph, *sotto voce*, but still audible to the disguised detective. "It may tell in a way you little suspect, old man, before you shall be given an uninterrupted road to Henrietta Mervyn's heart and hand."

Then they crossed the esplanade.

"It's odd that neither one of you knaves takes any account of a certain Mr. Mayfield in this complication," was the mental comment of Old Falcon, as he followed. "'But there's blood i' the face of the moon,' as Shakespeare says."

CHAPTER XX.

THE GODLOVE BOARDING-HOUSE.

HARVEY MAYFIELD awoke in his bed so miserably unhappy over his misunderstanding with Retta Merrivale that he could hardly wait to complete his toilette before beginning a contrite and abjectly apologetic letter to her, with the resolve to post it before breakfast.

He was thus engaged when the irrepressible Therese's tap at his door made him painfully aware that his chilling and repellent course with regard to her on the previous morning had had about as much effect as water on a duck's back.

"Is it that I hear you stirring, *cher ami*?" called out her pretty voice.

"You do not," was the cold response. "I am writing."

"*Cher ami!*" in a wheedling tone.

"Am engaged."

Then he smiled, with an air of relief, as there was the sound of her door being slammed to, in a manner quite the reverse of wheedling.

She was, however, in readiness to pounce upon him as he was about descending the stair, letter in pocket, hat on head.

"*Cher amoureux.*"

"I'm nothing of the sort!" he retorted with a scowl.

"But one moment, one little moment, *cher-sanglier!*"—[Wild boar.]

"That is better. Well, *chere Madame Bertrande?*"

"How? *Mais n'importe!* What is this I hear of your *belle musicienne*, who is to visit the ancient Godlove and other ladies to-morrow?"

"I am ignorant of what you might be pleased to hear, madame."

"*Beau brigand!* But I, too, am willing to take lessons, and pay for them, into the bargain."

"Your singing is certainly susceptible of improvement. See the lady when she arrives, if you think it worth your while."

"Do you venture on such a piece of advice," archly, "knowing my proneness to jealousy?"

"I venture on yet another, if you won't be offended."

"Ah, *cheri!* and what is that?"

"Avoid such a pronounced *deshabille*, at least on stair-landings and in passageways. *Bonjour, madame!*" And he passed on, regardless of the dangerous glitter in the black eyes, which he should ere this have learned to dread.

La Travadeuse quietly waited till she heard the street-door close behind him, and his crunching step on the gravelled walk without.

Then she darted into his room, closing the door after her.

A set resolve was in her comely face. Her movements were feline in their noiselessness, simian in their activity.

A moment later she had skillfully picked the lock of the writing-table drawer in which Mayfield had thrust away the memorized transcription of Burkitt's scrawled directions, together with the semi-telltale blotter, as it might be called.

But a partial disappointment was awaiting her.

Mayfield had long since destroyed the transcription, as being of no further use to him, and only the cabalistic blotting-pad remained.

However, with knitted brows she pored over this, as the next best thing to the original that had left its tantalizing undecipherable impress thereon.

There it was, as the rough, *ante-mortem* stamp of the doom-marked convict's hand had left it:

"Tw. m.... S...rs, ...ll .ack fr...r...r r...d, ...ted, tum... d...n ...try...se, ...ed .. ev.r...ne as be... h...t.d, in m...dd.. of ..d g...n a.d o.ch..., l...g s... o...rg...n o... re...gni...n a...cency. Th...e c...s u.d... h...e. In s...ll... o.e, to N, a...d... p...n...n. D.g... p...e. U... p...te, t...f...do... op...g...rn wa... In th...t...t... cash b...s, c...mm d t... th...ds. J.M B...rr."

But the deciphering of this was a hopeless task that had already baffled Old Falcon himself, who, after photographing the ink-marks in his memory, had reproduced them in black and white at his earliest leisure, but only to subsequently give over the attempt to make anything intelligible out of them in sheer despair.

Therese would have given way to anger—a too common resort of hers in a baffling dilemma—if that would have done any good; but, after giving up the effort with a brief inspection, she simply knitted her brows afresh, and reflected.

Suddenly an idea occurred to her.

She seized pen and paper, scribbled a few lines, left them lying with the blotter on a line above the rifled and still open private drawer, and smilingly tripped back to her own room for an earlier toilette than her wont.

She even beamed with exceptional amiability on Mayfield at the breakfast-table, he having first posted his letter to Retta before sitting down thereto without returning to his apartment.

The majority of Mrs. Godlove's other lady "guests" had by this time made up their minds to tolerate the rather *outré* heroine of the rope, the sawdust and the cannon-flight; some of them had even done her the honor to view her public performances, to their combined horror of her scantiness of costume and envy of her matchless proportions thereby revealed; and there was at last a general willingness to be amused by her Bohemian independence of the conventionalities, and especially at her matter-of-course monopoly of the Adonis of the establishment, so evidently to his disinclination, and not infrequently his undisguised disgust.

In other words, La Travadeuse was held in a species of good-natured sufferance, which, however, might at any moment be overstepped by some unforgivable *bizarrie* or fantasticalness on her part.

"How many of you charming dears are to take with Monsieur Mayfield's musical *protégée*?" she presently called out on this matrimonial occasion. "Don't all answer at once, please. Chere Godlove, your blushes are not needed to mark as a fellow conspirator of *mon cher amant*, Harvee. Trala-la! Trala-la! I feel like a music-box already. But what is *Mademoiselle l'Instructrice* like? That is what I want to know."

"I fancy you will have to apply to Mr. Mayfield for the information, Madame Bertrande," replied a pretty married woman, smiling. "The rest of us can only share your ignorance."

Mayfield paid not the slightest attention.

"Is she young or old, *cheri?*" demanded Therese, maliciously pretending an impatience she did not feel.

"Are you addressing me, ma'm?" And he looked up coldly.

"Why to be sure, *cheri*."

"*Cheri* isn't my name."

And there was general amusement for the others, for this comical baiting of the young man, so to speak, had become one of the table variations when La Travadeuse also chanced to be present.

"Ah, indeed!" persisted Bertrande, without being abashed. "Well, at all events, *mon ange chaste*, your song-bird had better not be named for good-looks surpassing mine, or there will be trouble in this boarding-school in hurricane order!"

"Maman!" said Mignon, speaking up.

"Yes, my seraph."

"Is it that there are to be music lessons, maman?"

"It is in the air, *petite*."

"And shall I take lessons of the madame, too?"

"That will depend," with profound seriousness, "on the mysterious *poursuivant*, my love—her *avant courrier*, her *maitre des mystères*."

Mayfield immovably swallowed his coffee, indifferent to the additional amusement at his expense, and quitted the table with his accustomed deliberateness.

Going to his room, the disorder of his writing-table at once attracted his attention.

This was the piece of writing Therese had left for him:

"MY BELOVED TO ALL ETERNITY:—

"Behold! I have deciphered the mystic scroll. I have read between the lines, deciphering every word so imperfectly and cabalistically presented by the blotting paper. Shall I have recourse to legal measures for my share of the buried treasure, as representing my lamented deceased parent's sole estate? I trust not, *cher amant*. Therefore prepare for my company upon your next visit to the hiding-place, which shall be this afternoon of this very day; or would you prefer my visiting it alone, and helping myself, by right of inheritance? Perhaps *Monsieur Le Detective* would accompany me for the asking. Eternellement Votre Bien-Amie,

"THERSE."

The young man's lip curled. Indeed, the attempted threat was so transparently impotent that he felt half-inclined to laugh.

"Ah, *mon ami!* are you hopelessly offended at my temerity in thus forcing the secret from you? Strike me, beat me, then! Your poor Therese shall not complain."

She had noiselessly slipped into the room behind him, and was already at his elbow, the laughing hypocrisy of her beautiful eyes peering at her own writing over his shoulder.

For answer, he burst into a contemptuous laugh, tore both note and blotter into fragments, and tossed them away, as he turned to go.

"I shall have a new lock put on my door," said he, "and then leave the key with my landlady. After the manner of a hotel. There is no other way."

"Wait, monsieur, wait! You may not imagine how much of that blotter I managed to make out."

A repetition of his contemptuous laugh was the only response he vouchsafed as he strode away.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MUSIC-TEACHER'S ARRIVAL.

THERESE BERTRANDE was not the woman to quietly submit to slighting treatment.

If she had been thus far somewhat more fascinated by Mayfield's manly beauty than she had experienced with his rather numerous line of predecessors in her regard, her mercenariness was still paramount to every other feeling in her odd and wholly unprincipled composition, though she was not altogether without a generous side to it.

She was at first so incensed at the failure of her shallow "bluff," as you might call it, for winning his financial confidence, no less than at his contemptuous disregard of the attempt, that she was strongly tempted to hurry after him, at the risk of creating a public street-scene.

But shrewder self-counseling prevailed with her, as was mostly the case.

She dressed herself magnificently, according to her wont, and sailed off grandly for the nearest office in which a New York City Directory was likely to be obtainable, her beauty of face and superb figure causing, as they were apt to do, the Tarrytown sensation of the hour.

There were few richer and more beautiful young women, married and single, in the land, than made their home among the palatial river-fronting mansions thereabouts at that season of the year; but there was doubtless hardly one that would not, at the simple bar of relative physical attractiveness and distinction, as constituted by the masculine judgment at large, have been compelled to take a secondary place as compared with the gracefully statuesque Therese Bertrande, otherwise The Whirlwind, *fille du cirque*, nee Peggy Burkitt, the daughter of the London slums.

She could have ridden behind the costliest horse-flesh in the neighborhood any day in the week, had she chosen; many were the flowers and yet costlier offerings left for her acceptance, with cards of well-known scapegrace names of the *jeunesse dorée* attached, sometimes hourly, at the *Maison Godlove*, to the scandal of some and envy of more of her fellow-guests; and as for perfumed notes, mostly in disguised hand-writings and fictitiously signed, beseeching for the honor of a passing smile or a slight interview, they were simply legion.

Obtaining the required Directory at the tele-

graph, Therese selected the full address of Major John Falconbridge, Detective, and without an instant's delay, sent off the following dispatch:

"Can you come to see me this afternoon, on important business? Buried treasure. Immediate answer awaited and paid for."

She then sunk into an eagerly-proffered chair, and amused herself by statuarily paralyzing all comers and goers while awaiting the return dispatch.

It came expeditiously:

"Yes."

A moment later, as Therese was about stepping off the sidewalk at a corner street-crossing, a swiftly-driven horse, about making the turn quite noiselessly by reason of the smoothness of the freshly-sprinkled roadway, was jerked back almost to his haunches in his driver's effort to avoid running her down.

As it was, she ran a very narrow escape, though without losing her composure as she stepped back—young women accustomed to being fired out of cannons may be pardoned the possession of a certain masculinity of presence of mind, in fact.

Then she looked up, exclaiming, sweetly: "Ah, it is Monsieur Mairveen that would have trampled my poor body to death, eh? Bonjour, mon fils!"

"Heavens! it is Madame Bertrande—the peerless, the astounding, the only Travadeuse!" was the exclamation in response.

Then, having caused his horse to stand like a rock at the word, the speaker, who was none other than Joseph Mervyn, gallantly leaped out of the buggy, lifted his hat, and was profuse in his apologies.

"I had altogether forgotten that you lived in Tarrytown, Therese," he said, at last.

"You have found it out at a risk to me, at least." She laughed, to the added illumination of her rich brunette beauty and the disclosure of her perfect teeth. "And how is monsieur, votre cousin? And have you drank any more champagne since the gay party we made at Delmonico's after the circus? There were twenty of us, at least!"

And then, without giving him a chance to reply, she interrupted herself by bursting out:

"What a beautiful horse! and the equipage is in kind. Ah, monsieur, you are then capable of *le mensonge*—the prevarication! The wine opened your heart that night; you told me you were poor."

"I must still stand by my colors, Therese," replied the young man, rather sheepishly. "The turnout is not such as I can afford, and is, in fact, a loan from a wealthy friend residing near here."

Which was strictly true, he having hit upon this inexpensive plan of offering Miss Merrivale a drive, and thus basely stealing a treacherous march on his elder cousin, notwithstanding the billiard decision.

A sudden idea possessed Therese.

"It is so early in the day, and the morning is lovely!" said she. "I don't often take drives."

He could do nothing else than offer her one, which was instantly accepted, and the next instant they were bowling along quite merrily, notwithstanding that Joseph's plans were somewhat interrupted.

Attractive as she was, he was sensible enough to know that she was altogether too expensive for more than transient wear; while the modest beauty of Retta had already engrossed his imagination to the exclusion of pretty much everything else.

"Which way?" was his first query, after whipping. "Have you any preference, madame?"

"Yes, since you are so obliging. Drive me to Yonkers. I want to see a young lady there who is going to give music lessons."

He looked at her in surprise.

"Can it be possible?" he exclaimed.

"Of course it can, my dear. Have I knocked you over with a feather, and why?"

"What is the name of your musical young lady, and whereabouts in Yonkers does she live?"

"The latter you must find out for me. They tell me she is a Miss Merrivale."

"The deuce! What an odd coincidence!"

"What is, my son?"

"My meeting you, and so on. I'll be frank with you. Miss Merrivale is the very person I borrowed this equipage for."

"To invite her to drive with you?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is really nice," complacently. "I can make her acquaintance, after which you can take her a short spin; and then you can drive me back home. And, if you make yourself extra-agreeable (to me), I will take you to the Maison Godlove to lunch with me. How fortunately things sometimes turn out!"

"Ye-es," a little doubtfully. "What is the Maison Godlove?"

"My boarding-place, to be sure; and the antique old girl can perpetrate a fair-to-middling lunch, considering she isn't French. Mind out, or you will run down that gentleman, as you so narrowly missed doing for me. Ah, there! Bon jour, cher ami!"

And she nodded gayly, with a kiss of her hand, to the gentleman in question, who, as they flew past, only raised his hat with stiff formality, though with a swift glance, not of jealousy, but of surprise, at her companion.

"Hallo! another astonisher!" exclaimed Mervyn. "Why, that was that chap Mayfield."

"A fellow-boarder of mine, whom I shall perhaps marry some day—if he behaves himself."

"You don't say so?"

"I'll say it in French, my dear, if my meaning was indistinct. But how did you chance to know my young Apollo?"

"I don't know him, save by name. He was pointed out to Jake and me but a short time ago. So you have booked him for the altar?"

"I said perhaps. My mind is not wholly made up, *mon fils*."

"Oh, but if his is, it's all right." And Joseph brightened up wonderfully.

"I hope you don't particularly envy him his good luck, monsieur."

"Candidly, and spite of your being such a stunning beauty, Therese, I rejoice at it, for my own sake."

"Don't be enigmatical because I am an infant, my dear."

Joseph laughed, and seemed to reflect.

"I'll be guileless with you, then, since you are so specially innocent, Therese. His being in love with you precludes a fear I had—he is so infernally good-looking, you know—that he was in love with some one else."

"Ah! with the little Merrivale, for instance?" Ann Therese's 'innocence' became astonishingly wide awake.

"Exactly."

"And you are ambitious in that quarter yourself, eh?"

"Yes."

"What is she like, *la petite Merrivale*?"

"You'll judge for yourself within twenty minutes—that is, if we find her at home, which is not unlikely."

"I am impatient. Tell me what she is like this instant, *mon fils*, or I shall administer maternal correction with my own whip."

"She is a very beautiful young lady."

"Her age?"

"Almost twenty, I should judge."

"Tall or squat?"

"Gracefully tall and slender."

"Blonde or brunette?"

"Brunette—I think."

"You think! What! you are in love with a girl without knowing her complexion?"

"Well, you see, my friend, I've never happened to see her in a very strong light."

"Come, now!" said Therese, very gravely. "If you mistake me for a fool, *mon fils*, I shall be strongly tempted to throw you out of this carriage, neck and crop."

CHAPTER XXII.

A MORNING DRIVE.

JOSEPH burst out laughing.

Three days previous, nothing would have pleased him better than to have cut Mayfield out in the imaginary case, by winning for himself the bold regard of the dangerous and beautiful woman at his side. But since then he had seen Retta, and was fascination-proof, at least for the time-being.

"I'll be perfectly frank with you, Therese," said he, after a pause.

"You've said that before, *mon fils*."

"But now I think you can help me. That is, a little anxiously, 'if I can be sure that you will not abuse my confidence.'

"My child, I am an angel in fleshly disguise for the reception of young gentlemen's confidences. They take to me as naturally as ducks to the water, or little chicks to the maternal brooding wings."

"No, but in earnest—upon your honor, as a woman, you know."

"Upon my honor, then."

"Let me begin, then, by requesting you not to address me by my surname in Miss Merrivale's presence, but as Mr. Josephs."

"Mr. Josephus, if you say so."

"Mr. Josephs will answer."

"I shall not forget, my dear."

"You see, my Cousin Jake and I only introduced ourselves to her last night. I am, in the young lady's estimation, Mr. or Herr, Josephs, a musical professor. Jake is Mr. Jacobs, my most promising pupil."

"How interesting! Is monsieur votre cousin also in love with her?"

"He sha'n't have any show, if he is!" with a black look.

"Why should you think that?"

"By the commendable zeal with which you both seem to have initiated a scoundrelly deception with the young girl at the outset."

"You speak plainly—for a beauty of your own immaculateness!" he sneered.

"Whatever I may be, or have been, monsieur," said Therese, with an unusual quietness of manner, "understand one thing. No pure young woman shall make one step toward wretched ruin, I being by, without my strong, if somewhat stained, hand being stretched out to warn, to succor and to save. I might make an exception in the case of one who had threatened

to cross my own passions—there is so much of the Godless wretch in me that I don't exactly know—but I hope not."

He looked at her in unaffected astonishment.

With the shallowness of most thoroughly corrupt men—who at last can only judge all others men and women by their own miserable standard—he was incapable of conceiving that womanliness has an inborn sense of generosity for innocence in its own sex that no amount of corruption can ever wholly conquer or overslaugh.

The infamous Theodora sent a favorite nobleman to the bowstring for merely hinting of disonor to one of her girl-slaves—a poor but guileless clod from Numidia; Messalina herself had an oasis in her passion-parched desert of a heart for maidenly innocence when menaced; and it is well known that Russia's imperial monster, Catherine II, while leading the rout of magnificent license at her guilt-starred iniquitous court, could frowningly wave back the hesitating yet fascinated steps of uncontaminated purity from the brink of its dazzling maelstrom.

"Therese, you surprise me!" was all that Joseph could say.

"I have no doubt of it, for you are a man, and not a good one at that." And her lip slight curled, while he felt that her bold but clear eyes were looking him through and through. "Now go on with the story of your conspiracy—for it can amount to nothing else than that—and be careful that you omit nothing."

"By heaven!" he cried, flushing, "it may be a conspiracy, but I mean honorably. I would give my left hand, off at the wrist, to marry the girl!"

"A left hand, eh? Perhaps Mr. Jacobs would give his right. But go on, I say."

He had said too much to draw back, leaving himself not a little at her mercy. Moreover, she still might help as against Mayfield, whose alleged enchainment at the Bertrande chariot wheel he was disposed to have some doubts upon.

"I'll make a clean breast of it," said he, after another pause, occupied in meditatively flicking the flies off his horse, which was a daisy stepper.

And he did so, even to the cousinly joint connection with Old Falcon, the detective, with regard to the treasure-search; the probability that Retta Merrivale was none other than Henrietta Mervyn, the treasure's rightful owner, though doubtless ignorant of its possible recovery; the match game of billiards, with what had been staked thereon, of the preceding day; and the subsequent meeting with the young girl on the part of both cousins.

Indeed, so astonished at himself was the young man for the unreservedness of his disclosures, that he half-fancied they must have been evoked from him by some occult, mesmeric power in the adventuress at his side, and he already began to regret not having substituted a cunning fabrication for the truth.

But, though he could not be aware of it, in no other way could he have so stimulated her self-interest in his unworthy cause, so far as Mayfield's possible rivalry was concerned.

The weakness of the latter's armor was at once exposed to her.

True, Harvey, on his part, could not yet imagine the young mill operative's identity with the heiress to those stolen thousands, which she suspected him to have already made drafts, or a draft, upon. She knew him to be not sufficiently base for that. But had not his chance meeting with the young girl, so fateful in its coincidence, most likely had some connection with his visit to the treasure itself? And could there finally be any better means of shaming him out of the enchantment exerted, doubtless unconsciously, over him by the purity and simplicity of the girl's character, than by presenting the truth to him, in connection with his own dishonest appropriation of a portion of the treasure?

For Therese had never known or guessed the true story of the stolen fortune before. She knew that, even as her own miserable and despicable father's heir-at-law, she could have no more claim to it than Mayfield, or any other chance discoverer; while any endeavor to even share the ill-gotten money with him would constitute a felony—something which she was not prepared to risk, for La Travadeuse, apart from the gratification of her ill-governed emotional desires, had ever held the criminal laws of any country in which she chanced to cast her lines in deep and abiding respect.

And, lastly, the Adonis-like image of the backsliding divinity student began to assume fairer colors and nobler proportions in her imagination. She recalled even his Bayard-like resistance to her own fascinations, a slight that had but recently both angered and disgusted her, to his advantage. He had been, as she supposed, the transient idol of her cormorant sensuousness; he was now something more—something better, worthier and more durably precious.

Was she, even La Travadeuse herself, really, purely, sentimentally in love at last, and with a man of more than the average morality, at

that? Perhaps she hardly knew herself. But the sensation was not a displeasing one, if not absolutely unique in her experience—which it probably was; and now more than ever, and with more creditable motives than had ever theretofore inspired her, did she resolve to win and keep Harvey Mayfield to herself, as against all counter fascinations, even that of windfall wealth itself.

"So, *mon fils*, an interesting story, truly!" was her sole comfort.

"But what do you think of my chances with the girl, Therese?" demanded the young man, uneasily.

"Humph!" enigmatically. "I can tell you better after I shall have seen her."

"Oh, of course!"

"I can tell you what to beware of, however, and that on the spot."

"What is that, Therese?"

"Mr. Jacobs's temper, when he shall discover the extent of your dishonorable treachery; and the detective's displeasure, for both of you. Trifling with such a man as Old Falcon is mighty like playing with fire, *mon fils*."

"The latter is dangerous ground, I grant," admitted the scamp, with a loud laugh. "But that for Cousin Jake, agreement or no agreement!" And he snapped his fingers contemptuously.

Then he whipped up, for they were now passing through South Yonkers, and Retta's cottage was already in view.

A man was handing a young lady out of a buggy at the gate.

"Good Lord! Can he have forestalled me?" gasped Joseph, with an oath. "Your eyes are better than mine, Therese. Is that really my cousin Jake with the young woman?"

"It looks very like it, *mon fils*," was the composed reply.

CHAPTER XXIII.

RETTA MERRIVALE AT HOME.

"HALLO, Mr. Josephs! is that you?" exclaimed the pseudo Mr. Jacobs, looking up with an odd expression, besides exchanging a surprised bow with La Travadeuse, as his fellow conspirator drove up to the gate. "I hardly expected to meet you this morning."

Joseph Mervyn could be an arch-dissembler on occasion.

"Easily explained, professor," he jauntily replied, to the concealment of a jealous scowl. "You see, I half-suspected you would visit Miss Merrivale this morning. So, not to be outdone, I recollect Madame Bertrande's living at Tarrytown, and hurried up there to secure her as an initial pupil for Miss Merrivale's instructions."

Here he assisted Therese to alight, and the young women were introduced to each other.

Retta, who had remained with a puzzled look at the gate, and was appearing refreshingly charming in a pretty and not inexpensive gingham suit—a hoarded luxury of her better days—and mull-trimmed hat, surveyed the gorgeous beauty of Therese with a species of large-eyed homage, the reverse of unflattering to its object; while the latter impassively passed mental judgment upon the undeniable beauty and reserved simplicity of the younger girl, which might or might not be to the latter's advantage, for, with her own sex, Therese was as impenetrable as marble.

"You have been driving, too?" Therese asked.

"Yes; and quite unexpectedly," replied Retta, in her shy, sweet voice. "Am I not in luck, madame? Mr. Jacobs, who is Professor Joseph's favorite pupil, has been good enough to present me to two lady friends in the vicinity, who may take lessons of me—though they wouldn't be certain about it. And now here is the professor himself, bringing you with him."

"So that I may really prove the fortunate initial pupil, after all. Eh, *petite*?"

"Oh, I hope so, ma'm!" with flushed cheeks and hopeful eyes; "and I shall try so hard to give you satisfaction. But do come into the house!"

They walked up the garden path, the two men following, and the adventuress studying at her leisure the sweet, color-shifting face of her companion, who kept on talking of her hopes and prospects with a confidential ingenuousness that was quite refreshing.

Retta showed them into Mrs. Kelly's poor little cottage parlor, with not a trace of apology for its poverty in either her air or manner, as might have been manifested by either a coarser or a weaker nature under like circumstances.

"Do be seated," she went on, busying herself especially in making her lady visitor comfortable. "It is a cool little room, and I have often enjoyed its seclusion on Sundays, or after a particularly exhausting day in the factory."

"Factory!" echoed Therese. "Mais, ma pauvre petite, ou est votre instrument? On ne peut faire de musique, sans le piano-forte." ["But where is your instrument, my poor child? We cannot be musical without a piano."]

Retta blushed, but not shamefacedly at all.

"It is an anomaly in my own case, at all events, ma'm," she laughingly responded, in the same language, and with a purity of Parisian accent fully equaling Therese's own. "How

kind of you to address me so democratically, you are most likely so rich!"

"No I'm not—not rich, I mean," interposed La Travadeuse, bluntly. "I live on my wits—which is the same as saying the muscles in my legs and arms, together with my good looks and my shape."

Retta's eyes grew big again. She had imperfectly caught the name Bertrande, and did not yet suspect her visitor's identity with the Therese, The Whirlwind, of whom Mayfield had told her. However, she doubtless merely judged that Therese's words were a jest.

"I might equally say that I am not a musician—not yet," she replied, with her pretty smile. "You see, madame, I have been a mill operative. In fact, the work was killing me; and it was but a short time ago—a very short time ago—a fortunate accident revived my hopes of getting back to my beloved music. Don't think, however, that I have ever had any experience in imparting the art to others; for that would not be true."

"What a miserable politician I would make!" she added, catching her breath with a little sigh. "Now that my disqualifications are so heedlessly laid bare, perhaps you—you won't care to give me a chance. However," with a slight tremor of the lip, "who could justly blame you?"

Here La Travadeuse set her at ease, while astonishing her afresh, by making use of the following words:

"Oh, bother the music, *chere petite*! I shall engage lessons of you, and at your own price, if you can no more sing than a peacock, and if your sole instrument is a hurdy-gurdy."

Retta broke into a laugh, like a peal of bells, and both bogus professor and sham pupil joined in it, though both were as yet not a little in the dark as to the readings between the lines in the interchanges that were going on.

"I am afraid you will prove overkind, ma'm," cried the young girl.

"No more of that, *cherie*. Wait first to judge if you will accept me."

Retta stared.

"Perhaps you didn't catch my name fully," Therese continued, calmly. "My dear, I am not unknown to fame, though perhaps of not quite the sort that you can approve of."

"You are then famous, ma'm?"

"I am Therese Bertrande, otherwise La Travadeuse, or The Whirlwind."

Retta uttered a little exclamation.

"What!" she stammered; "the beautiful human cannon-ball, who boards in the same house—the *maison* Godlove—with my—with Mr. Mayfield?"

Therese fairly beamed on her in response, while Jacob and Joseph exchanged glances.

"Yes, my dear, the same," with a gesture as if kissing her hand to a roaring sea of spectators after a successful flight upon the flying trapeze. "Perhaps you won't so much care to give me music lessons now."

"But why not, ma'm?" Retta was rather unsophisticated in the world of amusements, and had an idea from what Harvey had said that Therese's position therein was not unlike a prima donna's. "Why, I should think it an awfully delightful thing to be so famous, and so beautiful, with all the world wondering and speculating and paying money to come and see one!"

For the moment at least, Therese could have hugged her.

"It is arranged, then, *chere petite*. You are, then, acquainted with my handsome friend, Mr. Mayfield?"

"Yes, ma'm," and Retta hung her head a little.

She began to recall what Harvey had laughingly told about the ridiculous rivalry of both Therese and Mrs. Godlove, and was naturally diffident and confused.

"Is he such a very good friend of yours, this handsome Mr. Mayfield, little one?"

Retta raised her head with her ingenuousness to the fore again.

"It is nothing to me that he is handsome, ma'm," she replied, very steadily, but with a changing color. "And I have only seen him twice in my life."

"Twice may be often under certain circumstances, my dear," playfully.

"He not only saved my life, ma'm," in a very low voice, "but he assisted me nobly—most delicately—when I most needed a friend. I owe it to him that I am now full of hope, new courage, a desire to live and strive on; whereas he first found me hopeless, oh, so miserable," with a passing shudder, "and on the brink of self-destruction!"

"No wonder that you feel beholden for such generous services. And how long since you first met Mr. Mayfield, *petite*?"

"Only night before last, ma'am. Ah, madame! how radiantly beautiful you are! And I suppose you see a good deal of my friend, Mr. Mayfield?"

"Naturally, yes," with a careless air of possessiveness. "They do say," smiling and blushing—for even La Travadeuse could blush on occasion, "that I monopolize the poor boy. But then there is a houseful of women at the *maison*

Godlove, which leaves the envy and gossip a thing understood."

For perhaps the first time Retta became thoroughly aware that she loved Harvey Mayfield, for she knew for the first time a pang that was a jealous pang.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON THE TRAIN.

SATISFIED, and perhaps a little contrite, with having implanted her dart, Therese arose to go.

"Is it then arranged," she said, holding out her hand, with her sweetest smile. "When shall I look for my first music lesson?"

"I have fixed to-morrow for a visit to your boarding-house, ma'm," said Retta. "You have a piano in the house, I presume?"

"Two of them, in fact. I would see you alone a moment, Miss Merrivale."

And, with a bow to the gentlemen, they withdrew.

As for the *pseudo* professor and his bogus pupil, they had scarcely had an opportunity to say a word, save as between themselves, and were feeling the reverse of satisfied, though in different ways, with the fifth and sixth coach-wheel parts they had been compelled to play during the chat.

"Why, it has been raining since our coming into this stuffy little hole!" growled Joseph, who had stepped to the window, and parted the curtains.

"No wonder," was Jacob's answering growl.

"The weather has had time to change over and over again. We've been in this box an hour, if we've been here a minute."

"What did you do with your turnout?"

"Nothing," replied Jacob, also coming to the window, to perceive that his equipage had disappeared. "I suppose the livery-man has taken care of it. His stables are just around the corner, and he was paid for the rig in advance. Isn't that bay of yours Harry Stanhope's?"

"Yes; I borrowed it. He won't thank me for those cushions getting wet, either."

"I say, Joe; you don't expect *me* to believe that you secured that rig for the express purpose of giving The Whirlwind an airing?"

"I don't care what you believe," was the fierce reply, for Joseph's jealous rage had been steadily smoldering, and he was feeling like a baited bear.

"I can pay for my rigs without borrowing them, any way."

"It's a wonder where the money is from, then. Three of your I O U's have been yellowing with age in my pocketbook since the devil knows when."

"Let them yellow. Joe, you know you had intended stealing a march on me with Miss Merrivale! Your bringing La Travadeuse along could have been only an accident."

"You are too penetrative, Jake. Didn't you steal a march on me by coming up here—and a successful one, too?" Joseph gnashed his teeth.

"You talk like a fool, or a scoundrel! Is our game of billiards so soon forgotten, and the question it was to decide?"

"Curse the game, and you too!"

"You even glory in your treachery? But I shouldn't wonder at that; and little good will it do you! I have been getting on swimmingly this morning!"

Joseph turned upon him savagely.

"I don't believe you!" he exclaimed, in a low, hoarse tone. "She cares no more for you than for me!"

"Don't she?" with a contented chuckle.

Here they were, perhaps fortunately, interrupted by the return of the ladies.

The private interview of the latter had simply consisted in Therese asking Retta if it would convenience her to be paid in advance for the lessons she was to give, which suggestion had been gratefully but firmly declined.

"*Mon Dieu!* it has been raining, and more is threatening," exclaimed Therese, on reaching the open air. "Ah, Professor Josephs, you will have to drive back to Tarrytown without me, while I take the train."

"That will be better," said Retta, "for the roads are already muddy. Wait!" she ran back into the house, and returned with her hat on, and carrying a couple of umbrellas; "I will walk with you to the station, ma'm. And Mr. Jacobs may wish to occupy the buggy with Professor Josephs."

Therese smiled her assent, while the gentlemen, after a moment's hesitation, seemed to think well of the project concerning themselves.

"A good idea!" muttered Joseph to his cousin. "We may come to something like a resumption of the *entente cordiale* during the drive."

Jacob nodded a little reluctantly, and then the separation was effected: Therese and Retta tripping away in the direction of the station, and the two cousins driving off.

An up-train was just coming in as the ladies reached the platform.

"I trust we shall know each other yet better," said La Travadeuse, extending her hand, with her dazzling smile—"and to our mutual happiness."

"Oh, I do hope so!" And the grateful color was again rife in the young girl's sweet face, as

she honestly clasped the proffered hand. "I do so want to be friends with a really good woman," impulsively, "and I feel certain you are such a woman, Madame Bertrande, because you are so beautiful and so kind!"

Therese started, almost as if she had been struck.

Then, suddenly snatching the girl in her arms, she kissed her on the lips, and hurriedly boarded the train.

Then, as she was entering a crowded car, she was politely offered a seat by a man, who had witnessed the good-by kiss from one of the windows, and who greeted her with a peculiar smile.

"Why, it is you, Monsieur Vieux Faucon?" exclaimed Therese. "What! and how fortunate! Are you even now coming in response to my telegram?"

"Yes," said the detective, seating himself at her side, to the envy of every other man in the car. "You see, your dispatch happened to find me with some time to spare, and I was also lucky in getting a train on the point of starting."

"Admirable! You shall lunch with me at dear old Godlove's, in lieu of Professor Josephs."

"Thanks! Delighted, I am sure. If the Godlove luncheons are equal to the Godlove breakfasts, I'm in additional good-luck. Professor Josephs, eh?"

"Yes."

"That reminds me of asking you who the young lady was that you just parted with."

"Miss Merrivale, who is going to give me music lessons."

They were conversing in low voices, and she made this answer with a peculiar look that was not lost upon the detective.

"I see that you already know the young lady for what she really is," he replied, answering her look.

"Monsieur Old Falcon, you see and understand quickly. In return, and *apropos* Professor Josephs, I see that you are equally informed concerning him."

"Yes. Therese, we have met before."

"Yes, in Paris. Don't allude to it, monsieur. It was a horribly unfortunate affair! But could I help it that a foolish young sprig whom I had never even glanced at, in return for his offerings—I can swear to that with a white conscience!—should blow out what he doubtless considered his brains on the steps of my hotel?"

"I do not blame you—understand that—and I only alluded to our first meeting in the desire to establish present confidences between us, if you have no objection."

"I have none; I wish it."

"Good! Be thoroughly frank, then. Why have you communicated with me—your controlling motive?"

"Have I your confidence in return?"

"I assure you of it."

Therese then rapidly sketched her experience of the morning.

"What!" exclaimed the detective, with an air of concern; "you say the two Mervyns drove off together?"

"Yes."

"Bad! bad! I hope nothing tragic will come of it."

And he knitted his brows, with an apprehensive glance outside, where the shifting panorama of the landscape was now indistinct in a mad whirl of wind and rain.

"Tragic?" she echoed falteringly. "You don't hint of danger to—to Mayfield at the hands of those scoundrels?"

"Reassure yourself. No, but of danger at the hands of each other. The poison of jealous rivalry has already come between them, and Joseph, the younger, especially has enough secreted black blood to overstock a rattlesnake's den."

"Ah, I begin to understand," with a breath of relief. "They are scoundrels! Small loss to the world if they might kill each other, for that matter; besides simplifying your business to a *clientèle* of one—that of Miss Retta Merrivale, *nee* Henriette Mervyn—eh, Monsieur Vieux Faucon?"

"Therese," said the detective, without answering her suggestion, "you seem to have somehow mastered the inner history of the stolen treasure?"

"I am not sluggish of putting two and two together, *cher Vieux Faucon*."

"I should say not. Well, what is your motive for interesting yourself in the business?"

"Let me first tell you, monsieur—for even detectives with eagle eyes cannot know everything in the world—that my original name was Peggy Burkitt, from the London gutters, and that Jean Burkitt was my father."

He looked at her in undisguised astonishment; and she went on to explain her connection with the fateful early morning, as it might be termed, together with the circumstances of her first acquaintance with Harvey Mayfield.

"Well?" he repeated, when she had finished.

"Well, my first mixing with the treasure business was entirely mercenary—a desire to compel a division of the proceeds, as my de-lightful papa's heir-at-law."

"I understand. But now?"

"Now it is to save the man I love from continued dishonesty, that I may perhaps," with a genuine blush, "share his heart without danger to him or shame to myself."

The train had just drawn out of the Dobb's Ferry Station, and was once more at full speed.

"Therese Bertrande, you have more good in you than I supposed—you are a noble woman!" the detective was saying, when there came an ominous crash.

CHAPTER XXV.

A ROADSIDE SURPRISE.

An ominous crash, a jolting, jarring, rending shock, a telescoping of the forward part of the car, dust, confusion, dismay and screams! and then the train was over on its side, confusedly jumbled in a wayside ditch, and the stereotyped railroad accident was an accomplished fact.

"*Monsieur Vieux Faucon!*" coolly remarked "the only original human cannon-ball" a little later, "I am indebted no less to your politeness than to your brave presence of mind. I am without a scratch, and may they hire me for a supernumerary if I haven't even escaped without a serious ruffling of my fine feathers!"

She was standing, pale but self-possessed, together with many other passengers, at the side of the wrecked train, from which Old Falcon had succeeded in neatly extricating her.

The disaster might have been much worse. The train was a bad wreck, and traffic would doubtless be interrupted for several hours, but not a life had been sacrificed, and the few injuries received were not of a serious nature.

The detective laughed, while secretly admiring his companion's nerve, which agreeably contrasted the panic and alarm that were still prevalent on every hand.

"Come; yonder is a farm-house," said he. "You shall even get out of the mess with no more than a wetting of the feet, *ma brave belle splendide!* But though the storm has let up, it will speedily get to work again."

"Allons!" and she nonchalantly followed his lead. "*On ne vive que de ses bras!*" ["We can but live by our labor."] "But wait! Ah, your cheek is bleeding!" And then she had his head in her arms, with her lace handkerchief stanching the slight wound.

"The deuce! that will do," laughed the detective, struggling rather unceremoniously out of her ministrations. "Stop. I tell you! Would you make a laughing-stock of me for an abrasion of the skin?"

"Laughing-stock, indeed!" said La Travadeuse, philosophically. "As if there was any daughter, or anything but their own selfish terror, in these panic-stricken cowards! But I fancy you'll pass muster now, Papa Vieux Faucon, with no more than a suggestion that your sweetheart may have clawed you a bit. Allons!"

Leaving Therese at the farm-house, the detective went off to make inquiries.

He presently returned to his companion, saying:

"We are at or near Abbotsford Station, it seems, and there's no likelihood of the track being cleared inside of two hours. But if you care to go on, without the delay, I can procure a scare-crow sort of a rig near at hand."

"By all means let us go on without delay, *cher Vieux Faucon*," responded Therese, with smiling promptitude. "Even if we are too late for the ancient Godlove's lunch, the ecstasy of a *tete-a-tete* drive in your brave company may not offer again in a lifetime."

He laughed, and, a few moments later, they were continuing their journey behind a horse whose architecture was a mild libel upon the livery-stable business, while the buggy secured was fearfully and wonderfully made, with threatened dissolution or dislocation in its every lurch and jerk over the rain-washed roads.

Though they were on the best roadway in Westchester county, the going was something atrocious after the force of the rain, with worse in prospect, and the air in noonday twilight, so dense and low-hanging were the ragged clouds, heavy with stored electricity and water.

Even Therese's philosophy was hardly proof against the discomforts of the situation.

"Oh, diable! des chemins infernaux!" she gasped at last, after being tossed, jolted and juggled about worse than a ground-and-lofty tumbler in her profession; "*affreux! horribles!*"

"Cheer up, *ma brave belle!*" smilingly urged her companion, whose iron frame seemed scarcely conscious of the hard knocks being undergone. "We are already beyond Irvington, with scarcely two miles more to go."

"Two miles! And look at the black wood ahead of us! Never mind. Remember my last wishes, Papa Vieux Faucon. My poor body to *mon cher amant, Harvee*. Since I am not badly proportioned, it will doubtless pay him to have my skeleton mounted for some museum. It is about all I have to leave him, poor boy, besides my debts. But don't forget that it is my last will and testament."

They had already entered the dense wood she alluded to—a wild spot, looking doubly wild and forlorn in the thunderous dusk of the re-commencing storm—and before the detective could

laughingly respond to this fresh extravagance the horse shied, and then, shrinking back, stood still, in spite of an application of the whip.

"What can ail the brute?" grumbled Old Falcon. "True, there is something of a washout here, but nothing like many a worse one already passed. Get up, Bones!" And he urged the animal afresh, but with no better success.

"Wait," cried La Travadeuse, taking a neck-stretching survey of the difficulty from her side of the vehicle. "Why, it's worse than a wash-out, my friend. There has been some sort of a struggle here, and recently. See how the soft road is torn and trampled with wheel and hoof-marks, and yonder is a long, smooth swath, as though something heavy has been dragged and trailed along down into that choked-up sluice."

"Take the lines, please," said Old Falcon, in a somewhat changed voice. "This may bear an investigation." And he began to get out of the buggy.

But before he could touch the road there was a horrified scream from his companion.

"There! there!" she cried, pointing to a thick covert on the further side of the gully. "A man's foot sticking out of the bushes."

"I see it; try to control yourself," replied the detective, and then his investigation was expedited with professional expertness and thoroughness.

"See," he said at last, solemnly pointing down to the dead human body that his exertions had brought to light. "My misgivings, as you perceive, were not misplaced."

Therese, who had grown very pale, could only nod and stare in a horrified way.

It was the dead body of Jacob Mervyn.

The head and face were frightfully contused, perhaps by murderous blows with some heavy, blunt instrument, but possibly by the trampling hoofs of a frantic horse, driven backward and forward unwillingly across the form when prostrate and senseless under an initial blow, the habiliments muddied and clayed out of all resemblance to their original elegance of texture and cut.

Leaving the poor, disfigured remains lying decently composed by the roadside, under the forlornly dripping trees, the detective silently resumed his seat in the buggy, and seizing the lines, fairly lashed and hectored the apology of a horse into something of an expeditious pace.

"Other work now," he muttered, presently.

"What shall you first do?" asked Therese, after she had sufficiently regained her composure.

"Notify the authorities, of course."

"And the murderer?"

"They may attend to him, too; though, of course, they shall have the tip from me. However, he may be shrewd enough to give himself up, with some sort of show for himself."

"How can that be?"

"We shall have to await developments, my friend. Joseph Mervyn was not only the worse, but the shrewder, scoundrel of the precious pair."

They were not long in reaching some sort of solution of the tragedy.

At the entrance to Tarrytown, now close at hand, they passed the wreck of the borrowed vehicle, knocked into kindling-wood, with its foundered animal standing tethered under a wayside oak.

Half a mile further on they met a group of constables in a spring-wagon, with Joseph Mervyn in their midst, haggard and wild-looking, besides being bruised, tattered, covered with mud, and without a hat.

He was too excited to be surprised or further startled at the unexpected apparition of the detective, even in La Travadeuse's company, but at once screamed out:

"Did you see anything of my cousin? Oh, it was a horrible runaway! I fear he has been killed—killed!"

Old Falcon gave him but one look out of those eagle-eyes, and then, with a nod to the officers, drove on.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"YOUR OBEDIENCE OR YOUR LIFE."

THERÈSE and Old Falcon did not attempt to obtain lunch that day at Mrs. Godlove's, but contented themselves with the accommodations of an excellent restaurant, near the railroad station, where they also managed to complete the business interview which La Travadeuse had requested by telegraph.

"You have what I know, and I have what you know," said the detective, as his parting confidential words. "Get me but one added clew to the whereabouts of the treasure, and your young divinity backslider shall be stayed in his downward course."

"And be mine, indisputably, my own *cheri* from that time on?" demanded La Travadeuse.

The detective smiled.

"That is, of course, *Belle Therese*," he replied, with a scarcely perceptible shrug of his powerful shoulders, "as Fate and the rosy god may agree."

"Ah!" murmured the queen of the *cirque*, with only a half smile; "but let me not forget how often they agree to disagree."

It was now late in the afternoon, and the weather had cleared beautifully.

As they were quitting the restaurant they saw Mayfield coming toward them.

He was walking very slowly, a pleased smile on his face, with his eyes devouring an open letter, just obtained from the neighboring post office, in his hands.

The letter was from Retta, in answer to his contrite missive of the morning, and was the bearer of these few but satisfactory, if somewhat enigmatical words:

"Since you confess your ill-considered hastiness, my good friend, I have it not in my heart to be otherwise than forgiving."

"I simply impose the conditions that hereafter you look before you leap, and know before you judge."

"Perhaps I shall meet you, when I call upon the ladies at Mrs. Godlove's house to-morrow forenoon, but not before then, please."

The young man looked up, with a surprised, if not altogether apprehensive start, on being aroused from his walking reverie by Therese's greeting, and perceiving who was her companion.

"If I remember rightly, *mon cher ami*, you have met before, you two?" and she smilingly looked from one to the other.

"Why, certainly," said Mayfield, quite composed now. "And now I recollect that it was the major here who first gave me a hint as to your divine identity with yourself, ma'm."

"You have perhaps heard of the fatal runaway accident?" observed Old Falcon, willing enough to place the young fellow yet more at his mental ease.

"Ah, maybe it was that which brought you here?"

"A terrible affair!"

"Still, I did not see you at the inquest."

"I don't care to be conspicuous in the matter," said the detective, still evasively, though secretly surprised that an inquest should have been set on foot so promptly. "How has it resulted?"

"I don't know. The crowd was too much for me, and I came away. Apart from the nature of the tragedy, I had got my astonisher, which was enough."

"Eh?"

"You see, both those young Mervyn fellows had chanced to cross my path, or rather puzzle my attention, two or three times, without my suspecting them as the clients of whom you had told me."

"Oh! But here is the result of the inquest himself, and apparently in no bad feather, after the rather serious ruffling of his plumes."

They had turned, and were walking up the pleasant village main street together; and it was no less a person than Joseph Mervyn himself who was now coming toward them.

Still pale, but thoroughly self-possessed, his person had been carefully rid of all traces of the runaway accident, a newly-purchased fashionable hat was on his head, and, in spite of the public attention he was focusing, which another might have found something more than embarrassing, he was carrying himself well, though with an air of sadness, as was appropriate to the death of a cousin and boon companion.

His face took on an odd look upon his first perceiving the trio, but he came to a polite pause, and even submitted to an introduction to Mayfield, on the part of Therese, with a good grace.

He then began to tell them of the inquest, together with his own version of the cause of Jacob Mervyn's death, intermixed with expressions of pain and sorrow in keeping with his possible sense of bereavement.

"You were doubtless the principal witness at the investigation?" observed the detective.

"The only one, in fact. Some one, however, had pulled poor Jake's body out from a gully, into which he had been fatally pitched, you know, while I still stuck to the rig till it went to pieces. The coroner would doubtless have had his testimony, too, could the man have been found."

"It was I," replied the detective, bluntly. "Madame Bertrande here was also a witness at the scene of the—the *accident*." And he fixed his penetrating eyes significantly on Joseph; who, however, managed to keep his countenance unmoved.

"Ah, I fancied as much," said the latter, coolly. "But really, you know, my testimony was all that was necessary to evoke an intelligent verdict in accordance with the facts. I have already made arrangements with the undertaker, and am now on my way to telegraph to some friends that poor Jake might have wanted at his obsequies."

Joseph then strode on, with a slightly accelerated pace.

"Pass along together, you two," said the detective to his companions. "I shall see you later at Mrs. Godlove's dinner-table, if she will kindly make a place for me there. In the mean time, I have certain business with the survivor of that painful *accident*."

He heard other particulars of the inquest, after turning and following after Joseph, but none that altered the complexion of the general result, which was simply this: Joseph was rid of his rival, and found himself a free, and, to all appearances, a wholly unsuspected man.

As the latter, however, was stepping out of

the telegraph station, there was a touch on the shoulder, and he found himself again confronted by those eagle eyes of Old Falcon.

A spasmotic flash, that was very like terror, came into the young scoundrel's face, but was gone in an instant.

"Excuse me, Falky," said he. "I can imagine your shock over the affair, but can't give you further particulars now. Hardly time to catch the train."

"You'll take no train, save at my command. Make yourself settled on that score, my man."

Joseph Mervyn started.

There was a steely ring in the detective's otherwise calm tones that was not only new to him, but strangely disquieting.

"What the deuce do you mean?" exclaimed Joseph, with angry haughtiness. "Have you lost your head?"

"By no means, though you may have at least jeopardized—your neck."

Joseph started yet more visibly, though he still kept his nerve, which was more than the average.

"Again I demand what you mean?" he demanded, with his habitual profanity.

"Come with me!" And the detective moved off a step or two, with a strangely beckoning, icy smile that about completed the other's secret disquiet.

Was the close-locked secret of his guilt already known, and were the fateful handcuffs already awaiting his white wrists?

"You talk like an idiot!" he fumed, the black blood of mingled hate and fear coming into his face. "Go on your way! I am not used to being ordered around in this way."

"You'll get used to it," contemptuously. "Come!" gruffly. "I sha'n't command you again—it isn't my way to bandy too many words with criminals."

If a scoundrel, and even worse, Joseph Mervyn was no coward.

His sallow face flushed, his watery eyes contracting and glistening like a cat's, and a savage, wolfish look settling about his lips.

For an instant he seemed about to precipitate himself then and there upon the detective.

"Don't try it!" sneered the latter, in his low thrilling voice. "One murder a day should satisfy you; and besides you haven't got your loaded whip with you now."

Joseph controlled himself, to put on an air of supreme astonishment and indignation.

"Come, then, I will go with you," he said, with a short laugh. "If there's a method in your madness, it shall be made known to me."

The detective led the way out in the village outskirts to a comparatively secluded spot not far from the monument memorializing the capture of Andre.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded Joseph, when they had again come to a pause.

The detective surveyed him with his terrible eyes.

"Unquestioning obedience to my commands, or your life at the hangman's hands—that is what I want!" were the words of his reply.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN A MONUMENT'S SHADOW.

In spite of his iron words, Joseph Mervyn paled to a ghastly hue, and he seemed for the instant incapable of an answer.

Old Falcon did not give him time to recover, but drew something from his pocket (which, unknown to Therese, he had secured from the scene of the roadside tragedy,) and held it up slowly to the red light of the setting sun.

"Do you know what that is?" he demanded.

"No," Joseph managed to reply, though in a hoarse, strained voice that seemed scarcely his own.

"Never saw it before, eh?"

"Never, to my knowledge."

"You are a liar."

Again the wolf-look leaped into the miserable Mervyn's face, but somehow the wolf-heart was lacking in its support, and he could only glare and clinch his hands impotently.

The detective's succeeding words were yet more startling.

"Murderer! it is the loaded whip-stock with which you so foully assassinated your cousin, Jacob Mervyn! You were scarcely wise to have lost it at the scene of your crime."

"False—false as hell!" came from the accused man's lips, seemingly like fragments torn from a shattered heart. "No murder, though I own we had quarreled—an accident, a runaway, but no murder! I swear it! Prove the contrary, if you can!"

"The murderous, the initial blow was made with this lead-weighted stick!" Old Falcon went on, as calmly as if addressing a jury. "Brief as was my examination of the body, this fact was conclusively forced upon me. The one fatal wound was behind the ear—a deep, crushing, skull-fracturing indentation, which this loaded whip-butt would have fitted as nicely into as a ball into a socket. Ah, gentlemen of the coroner's jury! what hayseed numskulls you are not to have looked for further testimony than the unsupported narrative of the dead man's companion, and how you missed it in not having this loaded stick in evidence!"

By this time, however, Joseph had recovered a good deal of his self-assurance.

"Was it to rehearse such a pitiful farce for my benefit that you brought me here, curse you?" he exclaimed. "Stand aside, nor seek to molest me further, or it shall be the worse for you."

But there was still something in the detective's stern calmness that held the fierce brute instincts of the scoundrel in check.

"My ultimatum first, if you please."

"The foul fiend fly away with you and your ultimatum! But what is it that you would demand of me, anyway?"

"An instant, absolute relinquishment of your designs upon Henriette Mervyn, otherwise Retta Merrivale, from this time forth."

"If I agree to your demand, what then?"

"A free foot, to blunder into fresh crime, and into the hangman's hands, at your own sweet will."

"Ha! And with no share of the stolen treasure, should it be brought to light."

"Of course not, as a matter of course. It would be Henrietta's sole property."

"Indeed! And if I refuse your preposterous demand?"

By a swift motion of the detective's, the fatal whip-stock was slipped out of sight, and a pair of glistening handcuffs were dangling, jinglingly, in its place.

Joseph had before this thrown a furtive glance around, and assured himself that the spot back of the monument, where they were standing, was secure from observation.

With a hoarse, snarling cry, he suddenly drew a dagger, and sprung without warning full at the detective's throat.

But, abrupt and treacherous as was the attack, he had reckoned without his host.

His launching onset did but encounter the empty air, so swiftly and shadow-like did the other evade it.

Crash! fell a trained blow from the shoulder, just on the correct spot behind his ear, and he was sprawling his length upon his face, the lunging down thrust intended for the detective's breast piercing deeply but harmlessly into the turf, where the blade, encountering a stone, was snapped off short at the hilt.

The next instant he was collared, rolled over, propped up against the memorial railing, and, with the shackling-irons upon his wrists, once more confronted his imperturbable Nemesis, helpless, if not humbled, defeated, if not tamed.

It was a momentous historical event that was commemorated there, but it was doubtful if the sculptured patriot on the apex of the shaft would ever look down upon a more silently and powerfully dramatic scene than the one that has been described.

"Well?" was all that Old Falcon said, after a calm and contemptuous pause.

"I submit," growled the other, with an undercurrent of profanity. "Your terms shall bind me."

"As fast as those bracelets do now, eh?"

"Yes."

"You must know that but a signal from me, followed by a whispered word, could now land you in a murderer's cell!"

"If I didn't know, curse you! do you think I would be idiot enough not to defy you? I yield me on the terms demanded, I tell you."

"But what guarantee have I that you will abide by them?"

"My word of honor."

"Honor? A puff of smoke in your case."

"It's all I have to offer, though. Take that, or let be!"

"No; there is yet more. True, I have the whip-stock (no less than the whip-hand) over you; but it is well to be fully provided. Let me see: the unfortunate victim of that deplorable *accident* was found, I understand, with no valuables to speak of on his lifeless person."

Then, and almost before the captive could divine his intention, the detective had turned his pockets inside-out with a few lightning-like manipulations of his expert hands.

Among the belongings brought to light was a fairly-filled morocco pocket-book, stamped with the dead man's name in full, besides a handsome American gold watch and chain, which the detective remembered of his own knowledge to have been Jacob's personal property.

Joseph's own belongings were a much flatter pocket-book, containing a few paltry one-dollar bills, together with some pawn-tickets, a silver timepiece of much poorer manufacture, a bone toothpick, a pocket-knife and a revolver.

With the exception of the latter, these articles were smilingly restored to him, while the detective quietly appropriated the dead man's property together with the revolver.

"Let me congratulate you, young man," said Old Falcon, still smiling. "You actually seem to have stumbled into criminality as to the manner born, since you were unable to leave your victim without despoiling the corpse. You'll do famously. Keep right on without swerving a hair, and you'll doubtless speedily attain the prud and hempen honors which you seem to emulate so praiseworthy. I believe I have no further use for you at present."

He struck off the handcuffs, thrust them into his pocket, and strode carelessly away, without another word.

Joseph started out of the semi-dazed condition in which the detective's expeditiousness had left him.

"Is the man a necromancer, that he should thus have overcome me, as with a warlock-spell?" he muttered, wildly.

Then he sprung out of the nook, his face working and dark with evil passions, and menacingly shook his fist after the detective's retreating form.

"You prophesied better than you knew, curse you!" he cried, under his panting breath. "You were right—I shall take no train, at least not yet a while. Designing hound! I fathom your game at last. You would track the stolen treasure to its secret hiding-place, and then make your own terms with the heiress for its restoration. Ha! but I'll cross your purpose yet, besides securing the girl, by fair or foul, into the bargain. What! have I reddened my hands with my cousin's blood, only to relinquish my golden dream, and at you hawk-eyed fellow's mere command?"

He darted away, for Old Falcon, though but in sarcasm, had not misjudged Joseph Mervyn's secret character.

Born desperado, in spite of an early breeding and education beyond his instincts, he hurried contentedly along the path of crime with the assured step and veteran air that were almost to the manner born.

At eleven o'clock of that night, the figure of Harvey Mayfield stole out of the Godlove boarding-house in the direction of the railroad station.

Yet another figure as stealthily followed him from the same house a moment later, and was quickly joined by yet another, a singularly graceful one. These two were Old Falcon, the detective, and Therese Bertrande, the latter costumed as a young lad.

They, in their turn, were secretly followed and shadowed by Joseph Mervyn, who had been patiently lying in wait, as if in anticipation of something of the sort, in the angle of a gateway not far away, and he, also, was disguised.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A GAME OF DUCKS AND DRAKES.

The stealthy movements of these three parties, the one secretly spying upon the other, may be briefly explained.

Mayfield, alarmed at discovering the sudden association of Therese with the detective, and only able to account for it by the supposition that they were somehow, however vaguely, on the track of the hidden treasure, was resolved to be at least beforehand with them in one more secret visit to the hoard, which he hoped would enable him to carry off the entire residue. For this reason he was provided with two grip-sacks, both of ample proportions, and he doubted not that he had successfully given them the slip with regard to his purpose, notwithstanding that both Therese and the detective had been in suspiciously close converse during the evening, and that he was aware of the latter having engaged an apartment of Mrs. Godlove for the night.

Therese and Old Falcon had, however, with greater analytical acumen than he gave them credit for, shrewdly surmised just such apprehensions and consequent action on the young man's part. The former had, indeed, gone to the extent of sacrificing her New York performance in order to participate in the game of hide-and-seek suggested by the detective. This will sufficiently explain the movements of the pair, as being intended to extract golden wisdom from Mayfield's stealthy expedition.

As for Joseph Mervyn, the last member in this somewhat ghostly and altogether surreptitious procession, his last words, while shaking his fist after the detective from under the shadow of the memorial shaft, are significant of his suspicious and his purpose.

Mayfield was being shadowed to the treasure's hiding-place. His shadowers were in their turn being shadowed by Joseph, with vengeful and perhaps murderous, no less than with mercenary, intent.

All boarded the down Express train, apparently without becoming aware of anything outside of their several projects.

Yonkers was reached, and still was the same game continued.

The night was dark until toward the end of the strange midnight prowl.

Then as Joseph, still hindmost in the string, reached a slight eminence in the road, the moon suddenly made her appearance from behind a pile of clouds, giving him a view over a wide extent of country forward.

It also revealed to him the figure of Mayfield in the act of entering the neglected grounds pertaining to the haunted cottage, together with the forms of Old Falcon and Therese, crouchingly following behind.

"The secret's out!" exclaimed Joseph to himself, with a great gasp of exultation. "Let me see. There will doubtless be considerable digging before the treasure, wheresoever it may exactly be, can be reached. In the mean time—"

He reflected a few moments.

Then, abruptly turning, he began to retrace his course with a speed that was not long in developing into a run.

He had good wind and fair staying powers, considering his dissipated life, and the pace he was pursuing speedily brought him to the gate of the cottage where Retta lived.

It was long past midnight, and yet, after a mere glance at the silent cottage, which was, moreover, quite isolated, he did not hesitate to knock at its door.

Almost immediately there was an answering movement within, and presently the blinds of the little parlor to the right were cautiously manipulated, while someone peeked out through them.

"What, Professor Josephs! it is you?" exclaimed Retta's voice, in a surprised and slightly indignant tone. "Sir, this is an unseemly hour!"

He was standing a little out from the door porch, in the full pour of the moon.

"Yes, it is I, Miss Merrivale," he answered, with unusual earnestness. "And I am fully aware of the apparent unseemliness of this visit. But it is on a matter of immense importance to you. I must talk with you now, this instant. Every moment of delay may be fatal!"

There was an embarrassed pause.

"I do not know what to say, sir," she went on. "Mrs. Kelly has been called away to a neighbor's sick-bed. I am altogether alone in the cottage. I hope you will go away, sir."

"I cannot, I dare not, without seeing you," continued the young man, with ill-suppressed excitement. "Miss Merrivale—Miss Henriette Mervyn," in a lower, but more thrilling voice, "I swear to you that it is a case of more than life and death to you! The recovery of your fortune is at stake."

There was a dead silence, and then the young woman's voice again, trembling and changed:

"You know me for what I really am, then?"

"Yes."

"Who are you?"

"Your cousin, Joseph Mervyn. My heretofore deception shall be explained and justified—trust me for that. But now every instant is of gold."

It was evident that his intense earnestness was having its effect.

"My fortune, you say?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Alas! what fortune have I?"

"That which was stolen from your father. It was afterward buried—is still buried, not two miles from this house—and designing, wicked men are even now searching for it. For God's sake, Cousin Henriette! Ah, it may already be too late!"

"Wait!"

Through the blinds there was the flash of a lamp being lighted.

When she admitted him into the little parlor, five minutes later, she was fully dressed, and, though pale and seeming to maintain her composure by an effort, somehow conveyed to him that she was armed.

To do the scoundrel justice, even the girl's extraordinary beauty, together with her unprotected situation, did not for the moment affect him otherwise than to stimulate his fevered object with regard to the hidden treasure.

Without delaying an instant, he poured forth his story, a cunning blending of fabrication and fact, in such earnest and graphic manner as served to place the whole affair before her comprehension in just the light that he would have her view it.

At first she was partly dazed by his revelations, but was not long in collecting her thoughts.

"And my other cousin, Jacob Mervyn—dead, you say?"

"Yes; a frightful accident, as I have sketched it to you. You shall have the painful particulars when time presses less than now."

"And this fortune—where is it hidden away?"

"Somewhere in a country-house, supposed to be haunted, less than two miles south of here, on this road."

"What! in the old house where I was born—in that very house where I first met Mr. Mayfield, under those awful circumstances, such a short time ago?"—This, more in the form of a startled soliloquy.

"How? What is that you say?"

"Never mind."

"You were born there? And it was there that you first met Mayfield?"

"Yes, yes; but do not talk of it."

"But I must do so. Ha! all is growing clearer. The convict's legacy! He must have been loading himself with part of the secret plunder when you chanced to meet him there."

"Impossible! He could not be capable of sharing such proceeds!"

"Could not! But wait: let me ask you first if he did not seem to have an unusual sum of money just then?"

"Yes," reluctantly, "a very great deal of money, I should say. And yet—"

She paused in a sort of agony, something of the unwelcome truth beginning to force itself upon her mind.

"Oh, he had been at the fortune—your fortune, the loss of which cost your father his life—depend on it!" cried Joseph, exultingly.

"I sha'n't—I can't believe it! At all events, I was an absolute stranger to him; he could not have suspected my true name, or my having any right to the treasure."

"Most probably not," Joseph was ingenuous enough to admit, though he repented it when too late. "But the fact remains that it was your fortune he was surreptitiously depleting—that it is your treasure he is even now, at this very moment, with two confederates, making another levy upon. Good God! while we are thus wasting our time they may be carrying off the entire boddle." And he snatched up his hat, with a frantic movement that was unaffected enough.

"What—what do you mean?" faltered the young girl, mechanically reaching for a wrap and bonnet which she had brought into the room with her. "What is boddle, sir?"

"The money, the money! Pardon the slang expression I used. But come, come at once!"

"What would you have me do?"

"Accompany me back to the haunted cottage, of course. We may yet be in time to intercept the purloiners. Come, come!"

"Who are the others, the confederates?"

"One is a rascally detective, the other a wicked woman in disguise. Delay no longer!"

"A woman in disguise!" But by this time she had put on her wrap and bonnet, and was resolutely leading the way out of the cottage.

"Yes; but fear nothing. I am armed, in case they should violently resent our interruption."

"So am I, for that matter." And she locked the house-door behind her as they stepped out into the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TREASURE AGAIN.

THOUGH Joseph led the way in the direction of the haunted cottage at an almost breathless pace, he found time to enlarge upon the explanation already vouchsafed to his fair companion.

"I still cannot understand," she at last said, while hurrying along.

"What is it you can't understand, Cousin Retta?"

"Two strange things, perhaps. The first is, why Mr. Mayfield—if really guilty of appropriating any part of a treasure he knows to have been stolen, which still seems unreal to me—should now, upon a second visit to its hiding-place, take two other persons in his confidence, especially with the intention of sharing the spoil with them."

"Ah!"

"How do you explain that?"

"I have not yet imparted to you my own suspicions in that regard."

"But what are they?"

"These two others, from what I have to-night observed, were not accompanying, but shadowing him—secretly following him, you know."

"Heavens! without his suspecting it?"

"Of course."

"But to what purpose?"

"You can conjecture as well as I. They have doubtless somehow got wind of his lucky find, and are bent on sharing it."

"Oh! perhaps to the extent of offering him violence?"

"Who shall say? Money has been called the root of all evil."

If this suggestion was intended to accelerate the young girl's pace, it served its purpose admirably. She now fairly flew, until actually compelled to drop back into a fast walk again, through very breathlessness. And the suggestion brought its own punishment, for the knowledge that she was prompted to this extra-baste solely by the idea of personal danger to Mayfield—doubtless already the possessor of her heart—was as the quintessence of gall and wormwood to her scoundrelly companion's jealous instincts.

"There is yet another inconsistency that you have failed to make clear to me," she panted.

"What is that?"

"The necessity for you and your unfortunate cousin making my acquaintance under assumed names and false colors."

"Ha! But I could easily explain that, only I shrink from doing so."

"Why should that be?"

"Through my shrinking dislike of speaking ill of the dead."

"Of the dead?"

"Yes—of Jake, you know. We were more as brothers than cousins, you must understand."

"What of that?"

"Well, I will speak! There seemed to be no help for it, in simple justice to myself."

"Do explain."

"It was all poor Jake's suggestion, you see."

"What was?"

"Our masquerading in disguise before you."

"Oh!"

"I combated the suggestion, but in vain. The idea was naturally repulsive to my instincts, which are guileless and above-board as a baby's. A trustful, transparent idiot was one of poor Jake's favorite characterizations of my unsophistication."

"Indeed! I should almost have guessed it to be somewhat the other way. But go on, please."

"Well, I was finally just weak enough to let Jake persuade me into the conspiracy against you, as one might call it."

"But what could have been the object?"

"Jake's was plain enough."

"What was it?"

"To marry you, that he might eventually possess and squander your fortune, of whose existence he was self-assured."

"Ah! to take advantage of my hard straits with poverty?"

"Exactly."

"And you could lend yourself to such a mercenary and unmanly scheme?"

"I was weaker than he, as I said, and ever the more easily led. However, I was not without a dream of my own, that might be deemed a selfish one, though I took no stock at first in the existence of the buried treasure."

"Well?"

"Well, in joining him in the conspiracy against you, I am afraid I was instigated in my turn to conspire against poor Jake himself."

"I don't understand."

"You will do so in a minute—perhaps to my confusion, if not to the blighting of my hopes. You remember the first glimpse we got of you from the buggy?"

"Yes."

"Well, from the family resemblance, we both knew you for what you were, for Henriette Mervyn, on the instant. The result was that Jake's cupidity was excited. 'The girl may be rich one day,' he said. 'I'll take my chances for it by courting and marrying her in her poverty, if possible.' That was the birth of the conspiracy against you, in which I was weak enough to join, though chiefly through a motive he could not suspect."

"What was your motive?"

"I loved you on sight! There! the secret is out."

"Oh, do not talk so!"

"I must—I can't help it! For the first and only time in my life, I loved. My heart went out to you, in what seemed your mute loneliness, poverty and desolation, like a river of sympathy. I said to myself: 'He would marry her for the money. I shall first try to find and save the money to her, if it has any real existence—then cast it into her lap, and, with the confession of my own pennilessness, pour forth the story of my love and hope!'"

She seemed to have scarcely heeded him, and now came to a pause through absolute breathlessness and exhaustion.

It chanced to be on that rise in the road whence he had turned to retrace his course, after identifying the haunted house; and she leaned, panting hard, against a roadside tree.

"You must not speak thus to me, sir!" she yet managed to say.

"You do not believe in the truth of my words, then?"

"I do not say that. But it isn't right—I do not like it!"

"You shall not be offended again. From this moment I am mute—a hermit with my precious, my painful secret forevermore! I can at least die in treasuring and hugging to myself the dear consciousness that I have known and loved you. But come; we must on!"

"I feel that I can go no further. I tremble, I am overtaxed."

"Do not say so! Too much is at stake. Yonder's the haunted house. Come; I will help you along."

She made a gesture of resistance, but, nevertheless, he drew her arm through his, and aided her forward steps.

After that her strength seemed to rally in a measure, and a certain rapidity of pace was once more resumed.

In a few minutes they had passed through the old orchard, and noiselessly entered the neglected house.

The reflection of a dim light was visible at the bottom of the cellar stairs, and then there came the hollow, ringing sound of a piece of metal being cast to one side.

Under Joseph Mervyn's cautious lead, the pair descended into the cellar.

To return to Harvey Mayfield, it behooves us to say that he reached the treasure's hiding-place in the north cellar, without a suspicion of being followed, though at that very moment the detective and the disguised Therese were close at his heels, and secretly, breathlessly studying his every movement.

He seized the pick and shovel, which he found as he had left them, and, having already lighted the dark-lantern, which had also been left convenient to his return visit, lost no time in removing the loose earth which he had cast back into the excavation on top of the cistern lid.

But this was a longer and more laborious task than he had anticipated.

There seemed to be something in the nature of the earth composing the cellar floor that caused it to settle and pack down to much of its original hardness.

In spite of reassuring evidences that it had not been again disturbed, he found almost as

much difficulty in re-emptying the excavation as in scooping it out on his first visit.

However, as he imagined that there was no necessity of special haste, he proceeded methodically.

At last the cistern-cover was reached, and it was the clang of the chain against its under side, upon his lifting it, that had sounded through the stillness as Retta and Joseph reached the cellar-stair.

In the mean time, the detective and Therese, on their part, were keeping such an interested watch from the narrow doorway of the adjoining cellar, as to have not the slightest suspicion of the secret flanking movement in their rear.

A few minutes later Mayfield was once more on the rubbish heap in the bottom of the cistern, his lantern turned on at full, so as to light up the confined space, his two large grip-sacks lying open at his side, and the precious contents of the secret receptacle scattered around him.

The detective and Therese were now stooping down over the aperture, peering into the cistern, and feasting their eyes upon the treasure-boxes, even yet without his suspecting their proximity.

CHAPTER XXX.

LIKE RATS IN A TRAP.

BEFORE filling his grip-sacks out of the cash-boxes, Mayfield placed his hands on his hips, and, squatting down in a rather undignified attitude, surveyed the money with a positively mournful expression.

"Even now I can't take it all away with me!" he soliloquized, with much bitterness. "How miserably unfortunate! The portmanteaus, stuff them as I may, can't possibly be made to hold more than half the money, and even then I would be overloaded."

He could almost have shed tears over this matter, which will appear so ridiculous in the eyes of the reader.

To have so much cash wealth at one's command as not to be able to carry it all at once! Can anything in the world be more melancholy and pitiable?

He shook his head sadly, while setting about the work of transferring the bunches of bank-notes from one of the boxes to the interior of the larger of the grip-sacks, which he had drawn, wide open, to his side, in as matter-of-fact a way as if studying to economize its space in packing up his spare linen for an important journey.

"No, no; it can't be done!" he said out loud once more. "Curse the luck! I can't carry off more than, say a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, even if I can manage with that much."

"What an infernal pity!" exclaimed, with mock concern, a deep voice from directly over his head.

Mayfield looked up, almost with a scream, to perceive the two pairs of eyes looking down at him through the great round hole—the detective's, which he instantly recognized, and the companion pair, which seemed to have something maliciously familiar in them, though they seemed to be looking out of a stranger lad's head, and an exceedingly handsome head at that.

But Mayfield was only startled for an instant. After that he was infuriated.

Instantly he was on his feet, revolver in hand.

"Accursed detective-spy!" he exclaimed, fairly gnashing his teeth. "What? you have tracked my secret, then? But the knowledge shall cost you dear!"

"Throw-up your hands!"

The detective's leveled revolver was in advance of the other's, though Therese was stretching out her hand across the hole to grasp it.

But at this juncture there was a loud, rasping laugh from above and behind, followed by a crashing double blow with the discarded spade, and both spies, man and woman, detective and adventuress, were precipitated headlong into the cistern.

Then the lid was hurled down tightly over the aperture, there came the muffled sound of a woman's protesting scream, and the entombed trio heard the earth being heaped back into the excavation on top of the cover, with their hearts in their mouths.

"You must not! You shall not!"

The word's were Henriette's, and she was desperately, even fiercely, clutching at Joseph's hands, which were, nevertheless, filling in the earth with an angry impatience, and without desisting in the least.

"Away, Cousin Retta!" he hoarsely exclaimed. "The would-be purloiners must be sealed up; otherwise your fortune is lost to you."

"Villain! murderous scoundrel!" and still she tugged at his strong wrists, even throwing herself upon the spade. "Do you forget that he—Mayfield—is down there?"

"Ha! you love him, then?"

"Love him? I—I adore him! What is a paltry fortune, the dross of money, to his life, to say nothing of the lives of those two others? Stop! stop, I say, on your life!"

She had by this time hurled him back, and a small revolver was glistening in her hand.

As by now, however, he had pretty well filled in the hole, he regarded her with a look of pretended astonishment—notwithstanding that her beauty was intensified by her excitement to that degree as to make his blood course like lava through his veins—and his ready dissimulation was at his command.

He burst into a loud laugh, that was an excellent counterfeit of genuineness.

"What?" he exclaimed, with a stare; "you don't really suppose that I would murder the rascals—entomb them alive?"

"But what else have you done?"

"Pooh! Sealed them up from above for safe-keeping. That is all. Who ever heard of a cistern without air-holes around the upper edge of its interior masonry? Otherwise, the storage of water would speedily grow foul, you know."

Of course she didn't know anything of the sort, nor could any one else, with even the most superficial knowledge of the laws of ventilation and mechanics. But for all that, she placed her hand to her temples and reflected.

"I seem to dimly remember that there was some secret passage in connection with the old cistern," she murmured to herself. "It had been partly filled in even before my father purchased the place, when I was but a child, though we had lived here before. "Yes; there was something said between my parents about a strange sort of tunnel connection having been discovered before I was born."

He only caught her last two or three words.

"Ah, I remember now your saying you were born in this house!" he exclaimed, willing enough to divert her thoughts from the tragedy just enacted; for that he had entombed the trio to their deaths he did not for a moment doubt—and, in fact, it would have disquieted him greatly to think otherwise. "But still you could not have lived here for a long time back?"

"No, no; the place has long been deserted, and is now in litigation, I believe. But tell me, reassure me," she was looking fixedly at him, as he could just perceive by the last flickerings of a chance scrap of candle that he had secretly lighted in the adjoining cellar before making the attack. "You are quite certain that they—those three persons—will not suffocate down there?"

"Of course I am!" he unhesitatingly replied, though absolutely certain to the contrary in his own mind. "Why, any one acquainted with the principles on which cisterns are constructed would know that! And surely, Cousin Retta, a few hours' imprisonment down there, even if somewhat painful, would not be an excessive retribution for their attempt to rob you of your fortune."

She had regained her collectedness in a manner that somewhat mystified him, to say the least.

"I say nothing to the contrary, Cousin Joseph," she replied. "But what are your plans now with regard to those entombed ones? What do you propose?"

"Let me think. It ought to be nearly daylight now, and this house, I fancy, is over the dividing line, and into the metropolitan annexed district."

"I believe it is."

"Well, less than half a mile to the south is Riverdale, the next railroad station below Yonkers."

"What of that?"

"How would it do to push on down there, tell our story at the precinct station-house, return with a squad of policemen, and bag the entire thieving trio of 'em? That would also secure your treasure against future mishap, too—less what Mayfield may have already appropriated."

This proposition was quickly and shudderingly rejected, as he had well divined it would be.

Have Harvey Mayfield publicly humiliated with a charge of theft, or of having appropriated stolen moneys! The very idea was terrifying. No, no; if he had succumbed to a vulgar temptation, it was not Retta's action that should expose him to contumely, however he might have fallen in her estimation.

"That is not to be thought of!" she said, decidedly. "Think of some other plan."

"Well, then, we'll leave them where they are till next midnight. It won't hurt them much, and will afford ample time for dark-cells reflections on their evil courses."

"That will do, I think."

And she composedly hurried away, as the bit of candle gave its expiring flicker, not pausing until she was once more in the moonlight outside the house, where he quickly rejoined her.

"One moment, Cousin Retta!"

"What is it?"

"I love you—love you to madness!" And he threw himself at her feet.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OLD RECOLLECTIONS BRIGHTENED.

HENRIETTE drew back under the shadow of an apple-tree, offended and annoyed.

"Why do you act thus, Cousin Joseph?" she said, with cold displeasure. "Do get upon your feet! Cannot you see how ridiculous this is?"

"Ridiculous!" but he, nevertheless, did arise, and quickly, too. "I simply love you!"

"Absurd! You have hardly renewed acquaintance with me since my early childhood."

"That is nothing. To see you, as the peerless young woman that you are, was to love you."

"Have done, I say! And we must be returning homeward, too. I have Mrs. Kelly's housekey. She will be both astounded and alarmed should she return before me."

He made a half-movement as if to detain her in the neglected grounds by force, but moodily regained the road at her side.

"It isn't my fault if I have come to love you to distraction," he presently said, as they moved along together in the first beams of the new day. "I had no intention of insulting you."

"Oh, but you didn't do that," she replied, more kindly, though still without looking at him. "I would allow no man to insult me, Cousin Joseph."

This was said with no reference to the pistol, which she had quickly put out of sight after producing it in the cellar; though it none the less reminded him of the fact that she had the weapon handy, and would not be afraid to use it on occasion, which was well enough, everything considered.

"You will at least acknowledge, though, I hope," he continued, "that my action in your behalf in this adventure has been disinterested."

"It looks that way, Cousin Joseph."

"But it must be so on its very face!" he persisted, earnestly. "I really, honestly tried to save the treasure to you."

"No one could deny that."

"I didn't offer myself to you first—or try to make your acceptance of my devotion conditional on saving the fortune for you."

"Granted, cousin. No; you surely did not do that."

"I didn't steal a big slice of the hidden money first, so as to make a false showing before you of a wealth that I had no right to—I didn't seek to dazzle your poverty, or win your gratitude, as a preliminary step to gaining first your love and the remainder of the money afterward."

But he had gone too far.

"What other ever did that?" she suddenly exclaimed, facing him indignantly. "Dare you to insinuate that Harvey Mayfield adopted such a course with me?"

"Well, you have as much as hinted—it was yesterday, when Therese Bertrande was talking with you—that he was rich when you first met him, and even assisted you. And it is well known that Mayfield was poor as a church-beggar directly prior to that."

"You pervert the facts, sir—whether wittingly or not is a matter for your own conscience to decide. Even if Mayfield was fresh from a surreptitious visit to the hidden treasure on that occasion—which is by no means certain—he could have had not the slightest suspicion of my identity with its legal owner. You yourself acknowledged that much not long ago."

"I acknowledged the probability of it—that was all. I was simply willing to give him the benefit of the doubt."

"Indeed!"

Retta steadily rejected all efforts at conversation thereafter until they reached Mrs. Kelly's gate.

Here she gave him her hand, with a forgiving though half-rebuking little smile, whose beauty once more stirred his blood.

"As a matter of course," said she, "I shall feel like postponing my music-giving debut at Mrs. Godlove's. You will remain in Tarrytown?"

"For the greater part of the day, to make the arrangements for my poor cousin's funeral."

"Could you find time to notify Madame Bertrande of my postponement of the visit promised her?"

"Certainly. And at what hour to-night shall you wish to accompany me to effect the release of our friends in the old cistern?"

"As soon after dark as shall enable us to escape observation."

"Say ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Cousin Retta, allow me."

He respectfully kissed her hand, and she hurriedly entered the house, finding, much to her relief, that Mrs. Kelly had not yet returned, so that there was little danger of her own absence ever coming to light.

"The mistake of my life, the mistake of my life!" angrily repeated Joseph Mervyn to himself, as he hastened away in the direction of the station. "Fool-shrinking fool that I was! I had her absolutely in my power in the old house. Why did I let the opportunity slip of compelling a betrothal. However, it will present itself once more this evening. When she shall find her lover, together with the accursed detective and that other chap, suffocated in the cistern, as we certainly shall find them, the loss of her last vestige of nerve will place her yet more thoroughly at my mercy. Gad! but that was a good lesson in cistern-building I caused her to imbibe. Who, I wonder, ever heard of one that was not left air-tight, no less than water-tight? A woman alone would have swallowed an assertion to the contrary!"

But if Retta had been gullible in the lesson of false mechanics, her memory of the old days when she had lived in the haunted cottage, a happy child with her good parents, had been slowly and silently strengthening.

And by the time of Mrs. Kelly's return, an hour or so later—to find that her amiable boarder had even got the breakfast in readiness—her recollections were so perfect with regard to the construction of that particular cistern that she was most anxious to put them to a practical test.

"I have been up a long time, my friend," said she, "and you see I have taken the liberty of making myself useful. How did you leave your invalid friend?"

"Much better, glory be to God, miss!" was Mrs. Kelly's reply. "But, bless you, you shouldn't have taken all this trouble on yourself. One would think you to be the mistress of the house and myself the boarder."

"That is all right. I do not forget that you have been more than once as kind to me as your means would allow. I hope you will find the toast and eggs all right. As for the coffee, it smells good at all events. Come now; for the morning is so lovely that I am bent on an early walk."

Retta fortunately possessed a good appetite on her own account, and she was careful to satisfy it to the fullest extent, in view of the perhaps arduous task that it was in her fixed intention to perform without delay.

It was still not seven o'clock when she once more set out in the direction of the old cottage.

"I know there was some sort of a cave at the back of the orchard that my poor father was quite certain had some underground communication with the disused cistern," she said to herself. "Everything is becoming clearer to me now. He thought the passage might have been used by smugglers away back in the War of 1812, when smuggling was so frequent up along the Hudson here. Oh, if I shall only be in time!"

She shuddered and turned cold at the mere suggestion that the long disuse of the subterranean passage might have so thoroughly choked it up as to render the air of the cistern fatally foul or suffocating.

However, she once more made her way, unperceived, through the neglected orchard, and was at last fortunate enough to find the cave-entrance of the tunnel under an overhanging bank, thickly grown with briery underwood and the gnarled roots of ancient apple trees.

She had not neglected to bring a lantern with her.

This she set down at the mouth of the cave, after loosening it from the newspaper in which she had wrapped it.

Then, running up to an adjacent tool-house, by considerable rummaging in its interior she succeeded in pressing into service a light, short crowbar, which was about the only implement left; Mayfield having, as we have seen, appropriated a pick and spade from the same receptacle on the occasion of his first treasure-seeking expedition.

It had occurred to Retta to make an attempt to reach the cistern from the top, but she had at once rejected the idea as being the least feasible.

Not only did she doubt her ability to dig down, unassisted, to the iron lid, but she was already beginning to have grave doubts as to her cousin Joseph's good faith; and she was consequently so much the more desirous of effecting the release of the immured ones without his knowledge.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SECRET PASSAGE.

HAVING boldly entered the cave, crowbar in one hand, lighted lantern in the other, Henriette was enabled to advance some eighteen or twenty yards without much difficulty.

It soon became evident that the tunnel was an artificial one, and, considering the length of time it must have been built, the walls were for a short distance in a fair state of preservation, while the air of the place was neither noisome nor particularly damp.

Moreover, the trend of it was arrow-true in the direction of the cellars of the house, so that she could no longer have any doubt as to the connection with the cistern.

But at this point she was interrupted by fallen masses of rock and earth, which wholly choked up the entire passage from top to bottom and from side to side.

Retta was almost in despair.

The obstruction in all probability extended back for a long distance; but, even were it only a yard through, she soon became satisfied that it would be utterly beyond her strength to pierce the barrier.

A great blank of horror fell upon her.

If such were the condition of the passage at less than midway to the cellar walls, what must it be beyond the obstruction, far away back in the cistern itself?

Must not the hapless miseries entombed therein be already dead, and perhaps long since?

She was suddenly aroused from her stupor by a dull, picking sound.

She started and listened intently.

Yes; the sound reached her again, and it was almost incessant.

It was a sound as of some one working to get through the barrier from the further side.

She called out at the top of her voice, again and again.

Joy! hope! At last she was answered by a response that was something more than an echo.

Faint, far-away, but, nevertheless, an indubitably answering cry.

With a final scream of encouragement, she grasped the crowbar and struck it into what seemed a large fragment of rock in the very face of the barrier.

To her astonishment and delight, the rock gave way at the blow, like so much compacted meal and, crumbling aside, together with a mass of debris, unto a sort of gully, relieved her at once of at least a yard's thickness of the opposing obstruction.

The rocks, for the most part, were but seeming rocks, composed of friable chalk and gravelly deposit, readily yielding to the stroke of the crowbar while there was unquestionably a deep gully running along one side of the tunnel wall, and protected by a broken overhang of the latter from filling in, that would serve to carry down much of such debris as might be removed.

Fired with new hope, the young girl set to work hard and methodically.

She was by nature of a strong and robust physique, and, though altogether inexperienced in this sort of thing, she soon began to learn how to improve her work and economize her strength.

In less than an hour fully four yards of the interrupted passage had been cleared, and though the obstruction still rose jaggedly before her, the sounds of the pick on the opposite side could now be heard much more distinctly than at first.

At last a specially fortunate blow caused a great section of the barrier to partly give way, and the sounds of the pick were suddenly rendered so plain that she doubted not a communicating air-hole had in some way been effected.

Again she hallooed.

Was it a dream?

The answering hallo was in her lover's voice, and she could even partly distinguish the words.

"Hallo!" came the faint-caught accents; "who is beyond there?"

"A friend!" was the joyous response.

"Well, keep it up, for God's sake! We are well-nigh gone in."

"Fear not! I shall remain at work. Are you all alive?"

"Yes; and better off now the purer air is reaching us. Who and what are you, friend?"

"Retta Merrivale!"

There was a long silence, as if the answer had been something of an astonisher, and then the picking sound was resumed; to which the young girl made response by once more setting to work with renewed energy.

We must now return to the moment when, after Old Falcon and the disguised Therese had been so unceremoniously and unexpectedly precipitated into the cistern, the three entrapped individuals exchanged astounded and somewhat appalled looks, while the sound of the earth falling upon the iron lid above their heads apprised them of the awful nature of their situation.

The young divinity student, who had recognized the detective at once, though the latter's companion continued to puzzle him, was the first to recover from the shock.

"I hardly think we're quite being entombed alive just yet," said he sullenly. "There's a breach in the wall yonder, which seems to me to have some connection with the outer air."

Then he remained sullenly silent, looking first at the spread-out treasure and then at the unwelcome intruders, while the revolver which he had whipped out of his hip-pocket in the first flush of his startled excitement was slowly thrust out of sight.

The intruders, on their part, being less familiar with the place, had recovered their self-possession more slowly, and were returning the young man's stare of resentful inquiry in a somewhat less assured condition than he.

Therese, being a trained athlete, had, notwithstanding the unexpectedness of her precipitation into the vault, managed to turn a half-somersault in her descent, which had enabled her to fall on her feet with cat-like precision. But she was now in a somewhat squat attitude, necessitated by the lowness of the vault overhead, and was observing Mayfield with a comical mixture of reproach and alarm in her great black eyes which, combined with her boy's costume, only served to increase his mystification.

Old Falcon had not fared so fortunately in the plunge, though he had luckily escaped any more serious injury than a somewhat stunned sensation following upon the shock.

After turning partly over in his fall, he had plumped into a sitting posture in the midst of the cash-boxes, scattering some of them and their contents in every direction, and flattening

out two or three others, as far as their precious wares would admit.

"We're being buried alive!" shrieked Therese, starting up; but almost immediately, remembering Mayfield's comparatively reassuring words, settling back in her enforced but rather undignified attitude, adding discontentedly: "But we're trapped, anyway, like rats in a hole; there is no discounting that."

"Who are you?" demanded Mayfield, still half-mystified.

"*Mon Dieu!* don't you know me, *cheri*?"

"Humph! Now I do. The devil!"

"Oh, no; not so bad as that, *mon ami*! though I frankly acknowledge to a spice of the Old Boy in my composition."

But Mayfield had turned his frowning attention to the detective.

"So you have run my secret to earth at last!" he said, contemptuously. "Well, name your demand," with a gesture indicating the exposed treasure, the sight of which was already making La Travadeuse's eyes widen. "Of course, you are come to insist on your share!"

"There's where you're out, young man—decidedly out," replied the detective, coolly. "But, before I answer your insulting insinuation, let me investigate this means of egress that you hint of."

As he arose and stepped crouchingly across the uneven rubbish-heap that formed the floor of the cistern, the last clods could be faintly heard falling into the excavation far above their heads, and these sounds were followed by vaguely caught intimations of that denunciation, on the part of Henriette, which had followed upon her cousin's treacherous work above ground.

"A woman's voice that!" exclaimed Therese, listening intently till the sounds had ceased. "Monsieur Vieux Faucon," to the detective, who had turned with some degree of satisfaction from examining the breach in the wall, "how do you account for our humiliating misfortune, notwithstanding that it has served as a summary introduction to our pious and wealthy young friend here?"

"We have only our short-sighted failure to provide against the treachery to blame," replied the detective, resuming his seat on the demolished treasure-boxes.

"But whose treachery, monsieur?"

"Joseph Mervyn's, without a doubt. It is clear enough now. He was shadowing us while we were shadowing Mayfield here; with which premises our present predicament explains itself. I should have kept the bracelets on the scoundrel's wrists when I had them there—there was my mistake."

"But didn't you hear that feminine voice a moment ago?"

"Yes."

"How do you account for that?"

"In this way," replied Old Falcon, after a moment's reflection. "After spotting the lay of the house here, he must have sought out and secured to himself a companion for the adventure that has followed."

"A companion, monsieur?"

"I figure it out that way."

"A female companion?"

"Yes."

"But this is astonishing! What woman could have induced him to accompany him on such an adventure, and at midnight at that?"

Old Falcon fastened his strange, soul-reading eyes curiously upon Harvey Mayfield's moody and clouded face, as he slowly and impressively replied:

"Retta Merrivale, otherwise, Henriette Mervyn, the rightful heir to all this money, together with that which may have heretofore been feloniously abstracted therefrom!"

The young man started to his feet so abruptly as to rap his head smartly against the vaulted roof.

"Good God!" he falteringly exclaimed, "can it be possible?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

BURIED ALIVE.

THERÈSE had evinced an astonishment at the detective's reply that was only second to Mayfield's, which was simply prodigious.

Old Falcon signed her to silence, and continued to rivet the young man with his eagle gaze.

"You somewhat emotionally ask if it can be possible?" he said, sternly. "Do you allude to the hypothesis of the young lady having accompanied our enemy in the misadventure that has been wrought upon us, or to the mere fact of her identity with the heiress of the stolen funds, sir?"

"To the latter, as a matter of fact," was the stammered reply. "Retta Merrivale and the banker's lost heiress one and the same?"

"Yes."

"Heavens! I can't believe it possible."

"It is the simple truth. Madame Bertrande here is a witness to the fact."

"*Cher amant, c'est vrai,*" it is true, supplemented Therese.

Harvey Mayfield sunk again into a sitting posture, and buried his face in his hands.

When he raised it again the shame, confusion

and self-contempt expressed in his comely features was most pitiable.

"Oh, if had but known, if I had but guessed!" was all he could say.

"This emotion is to your credit, sir," said Old Falcon, gravely. "I then infer that your course, with regard to this treasure, would have been different, had you suspected the young lady's identity?"

"Different? I should say so! Not only would my love for her have impelled me to throw it at her feet, but I would not for an instant have yielded to the temptation that has beset me."

Therese had made a wry little face at this mention of love for her rival, though she still held her peace.

"And you also acknowledge," the detective went on, "that even apart from the young lady's legal claim upon this property, your own course in designing to appropriate it (knowing it to have been stolen, though not aware from whom,) was criminal?"

"Of course, I acknowledge it," replied the young man, humbly. "I am not such a fool as not to know the distinctions between right and wrong—chicanery and uprightness. It was simply a base temptation, appealing to my vulgar desires to grow rich without work, and I weakly, miserably succumbed to it."

The detective's face had lost its iron sternness, and he was softly rubbing his hands together.

"Excellent! excellent! Better and better!" he exclaimed, half to himself. "When a man of naturally honorable instincts talks in that way, there is every hope for his redemption. I suppose, young mam, you no longer think me capable of having hunted your secret to earth to-night with a self-seeking motive in view?"

"I do not, sir," in a yet humbler and more despondent tone. "I offer you an apology, which I hope you will accept."

"Certainly, certainly; don't mention it again. By the way, this is likely not your first visit here?"

"No; it is my second one."

"And how much did you carry off with you at your first visit?"

"About thirty thousand dollars. But I have squandered literally nothing of it as yet, thank God! The entire amount has been banked in New York, with the exception of some hundreds now in my writing-desk, and two hundred dollars that I almost forced upon Retta as a loan, on the morning of our extraordinary first meeting in this house."

"Ah, then it is all right. No harm done but what can be rectified."

"No, no, no! it is not all right," burst forth the unhappy young man, in a fresh access of despair. "Nothing can ever be right again! I have dug the grave for my own happiness; I am lost, lost, lost!"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! do you not see that she must now be told all—that is, if we ever get out from this accursed hole?" and Mayfield looked wildly around. "For I will not shirk one hair's-breadth of the just penalty I have incurred. With my own lips I shall tell her of my self-shame, my depraved surrender to dishonest self-suggestions. And can you not see that she will then despise me?—that my last hope of winning her love and respect will have vanished?"

"Well, I don't know about that," said the detective, consolingly, and momentarily forgetful of La Travadeuse's personal interest in the affair. "You had no idea of Henriette being other than a poor and friendless girl at the time. There is that much in your favor."

"It will avail me nothing," groaned Mayfield. "I know her. Her contempt and loathing of dishonesty or want of principle in a man is simply superlative. I can never be the same to her as I have seemed to be, after she shall know of my shame."

"That is true, *cher Harvee*," said Therese, thinking it time for her interposition in her own behalf. "I have made the demoiselle's acquaintance, and she is simply an angel of purity—but uncommonly on your austere and icicle order. You have lost her irrevocably, my dear, but you haven't lost me. Don't forget that!"

He looked at her half-stupidly.

"You see, *mon cheri*," she went on, quite easily, while taking one of his clinched hands, and patting it in a motherly way, "I still love you to distraction, and will marry you, even if you haven't a penny to bless yourself with. There!"

He still stared at her, and then snatched his hand away with a harsh laugh.

"Let be, let be!" he cried, and then he started up wildly once more. "But let us get out of this hole, if possible. Come, come, come! The air is already growing close, if not stifling."

This was true, and his companions lost no time in following him, as he took up the lantern, and stooping entered what was evidently the beginning of a subterranean passage.

"No need to fear for our money during our absence!" he exclaimed, throwing a last glance back before stepping into the cave.

"Monsieur Vieux Faucon," said Therese, "you have not said how you think it possible that

Mademoiselle Henriette can have assisted our enemy, Joseph Mervyn, in this playful attempt to bury us alive."

"She cannot, of course, have assisted him," was the reply; "but was perhaps induced to accompany him, and in that way would have been, per force, a witness to our seeming murder."

"Joseph doubtless imagines he has accomplished our murder, then?"

"Without a doubt."

"But—"

"Oh, there is no telling what plausible fabrication he may have concocted to induce her presence at the scene. He can be eloquent and persuasive on occasion, and would doubtless hope to marry the young lady and her money sooner or later. But we shall neatly block his little game, if we but succeed in getting out of this." "Hallo! a find!"

They had been following Mayfield slowly and tortuously, and this exclamation was evoked by the appearance of a rusty old crowbar and spade standing up closely against one side of the passage."

"I suspect we shall have need of these," continued Old Falcon, taking up the implements in his arms.

He was right. After proceeding a few yards further, the passage suddenly widened out, and then showed a seemingly all but hopeless obstruction to continued progress.

The entire space was completely choked by fallen and settled fragments of earth and rock, just as Retta was destined to find it a few hours later at the opposite side.

"There's no help for it," growled the detective, pushing past Mayfield, who had come to a stupefied pause, lantern in hand. "We shall have to work and sweat for our deliverance, even if we are ever to effect it, which is unpleasantly dubious."

And with that, he dropped the spade and struck the crowbar deep into the obstructing mass.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AT THE BARRIER.

Two or three hours of hard and discouraging work followed, each member of the imprisoned trio taking spells at wielding the crowbar, while the spade would be in use to clear away the debris and dispose of it to the best advantage at the sides of the passage.

But the earth would not infrequently fall in from the roof quite as fast as it could be removed below in a forward direction.

Added to this was the condition of the air, which was hourly growing closer and more stifling, so that at last they could only breathe it panting, while there seemed to be no termination to the obstructing mass.

At last Therese, who chanced to be taking her ninth or tenth turn at the more arduous labor, came to a dispirited pause, as the point of the iron struck upon what seemed solid, unyielding rock.

She was probably stronger physically than either of her companions, but she was streaming with perspiration at every pore, and, brave-hearted as she was, a dogged, desperate look had come into her anxious face that was not good to see.

"I feel like giving up!" she panted, leaning wearily on the crowbar. "Messieurs et amis, it is not under trifling circumstances that your fair and gifted companion is inclined to throw up the sponge (oh, for one now, saturated with *eau de cologne*, to press against my nostrils!) but she is sorely tempted to do so at present. The beastly barrier seems to grow adamantine. Being fired out of my pet cannon five hundred times in rapid succession were as nothing to this work. Diable! it is heart-breaking."

Mayfield—the detective chancing to be handling the spade at the moment—came forward, and gently relieved her of the heavy bar.

His spirit was already much chastened, and he had grown steadily more forbearing and gentle with her since the hard struggle for deliverance and life had set in.

"Rest yourself on this broken fragment," he said, reaching for the tool. "I will take a spell now."

"No, no; you have only just relinquished it to me."

"That is nothing."

He insisted, and was taking the crow from her hands, when she touched his shoulder and looked up earnestly in his haggard face.

"*Cher amant, kiss me!*" she said. "Monsieur Vieux Faucon will not mind, and you have never yet returned one of my innumerable kisses, which," a little bitterly, but yet with indescribable sadness, "you have doubtless found unwelcome enough."

The young man hesitated, and looked annoyed. But, there was an appeal beneath her still half-bantering manner, to say nothing of a suspicious quiver of the lip.

"Is it then asking so much—too much—*cheri*? Ah, it was once but your comeliness that I admired. But the end of all things may be at hand, *mon ami*, and, even if you can never care for me—the slum-child, the convict's daughter, the dazzling bluebottle fly born of the corruption of the London gutters!—is it my fault that

I should have come to love you, howsoever hopelessly, before I die!"

Without a word, he kissed her, and, putting his arm around her, led her to the resting place he had indicated.

Then he attacked the barrier with a species of frenzy.

Had there been a talisman of safety in that kiss, than which none more chastely or brotherly had ever been bestowed?

Suddenly he paused and listened, a wild and hopeful look in his face.

"Hark!" he cried. "Answering sounds on the other side! Hurrah! we are not forgotten in our living tomb. Some one is trying to dig through toward us."

He fell upon the obstruction with renewed vigor, his companions raising their faces with a reflection of his hope.

Presently came Retta's first call of inquiry through the stubborn mass.

Mayfield gave an answering yell, and then Old Falcon joined him, and together they attacked the obstruction with crow and spade.

In a little while a great fragment, or rather section of it, gave way, and rolled off into a sort of masked gully at one side.

When full advantage of this windfall had been taken, several yards of the barrier had been pierced.

Then came Retta's second call, the words and even the characteristics of her voice being recognized.

"'Tis she, 'tis Retta herself!" cried Mayfield, joyfully, after shouting back the answer. "Our deliverance must be at hand!"

"Work more methodically, young man," cautioned the detective, as imperturbable now as he had been from the first. "We shall get on much more effectively than if you wear yourself out with such frantic exertions."

Therese had risen from her improvised seat, and was silently regarding them, with folded arms.

Presently she smiled.

She could remember what Mayfield in his excitement was momentarily losing sight of—the probability of Henriette's changed feelings toward the man of her heart, by reason of the dishonesty of his past course with regard to the stolen treasure.

"He may yet be mine," she thought. "But it shall be solely by fair means, or not at all."

Gritting her teeth resolutely, she fell upon her knees, and, in spite of her companion's protestations, assisted with her bare hands in clearing away to either side such *debris* as was now being fast detached from the face of the obstruction.

Thinner and thinner waxed the dividing barrier.

Presently they could talk quite distinctly with the worker on the opposite side.

In this manner Henriette became fully informed of the situation within, while the imprisoned trio were none the less made aware of the circumstances that had brought her to their rescue; and all this before the last obstructing layers had been wholly overcome.

At last, however, a final section of the intervening barrier gave way with a crash, rolling away to one side, and the junction was effected.

Mayfield was the first to spring through the breach.

But his first glance of Retta's face reminded him of what he had forgotten—her knowledge of his dishonesty—and he started back in confusion and dismay.

As he did so, he brought up against the detective, who said in a low tone:

"Don't take it too hard, young man. She'll get over that in time; I'll answer for it."

Retta had come to a pause, with the crowbar still in her blistered hands, and the expression of her pale face was a study.

The haggard looks of the two men had touched her to the heart, and yet when the thought of how unworthily Mayfield had won her heart she could not but betray some of the bitterness and resentment she was feeling, notwithstanding that she still loved him, and was even now all but exhausted with her efforts to save him from the material peril just escaped.

"There is yet another whom I do not see!" she exclaimed. "Where is the lady who was with you?"

At that instant there was a sudden fall of rock and earth from the jagged roof of the breach, and the two men sprung out toward her just in time to avoid being crushed.

The disaster had been accompanied by a sharp exclamation in a woman's voice.

It was Therese's. Peering back through the breach, they could perceive her insinuated in a dangerous, perhaps fatal, predicament.

She had fallen upon her back, and was keeping back from rolling in on her a huge fragment of rock with either outstretched arm, while toppling directly over her imprisoned form, there was a yet huger fragment, precariously supported by the side rocks.

It was evident that the least weakening of her effort in holding the side-rocks apart would indubitably be her death, by causing the overtopping mass to descend upon her breast with pulverizing weight.

Her situation was, nevertheless, such that

they could see her face, which was very calm and self-possessed, one might even say ironically smiling, in its serene expression.

Retta had uttered a scream, and grasped her crowbar afresh, while both Old Falcon and Mayfield were already attacking the newly-formed semi-barrier with frantic haste, even the detective forgetting for a moment his ordinary coolness.

Therese spoke to them from her terrible position with as much politeness and address as if merely courtesying in response to plaudits over the five thousandth successful performance of her cannon ball act.

"*Mademoiselle et messieurs*," she called out, agreeably, "if it is for me that you are making those desperate but somewhat idiotic exertions, let me beg that you will proceed more composedly. Else I very much fear that I shall be compelled to make my adieu before you can possibly reach me—and without kissing my hand to you, at that; which would be plainly unprofessional."

"Can you hold out till we can reach you—say, three minutes longer?" cried the detective, striving to organize the exertions in accordance with her very sensible advice.

"Monsieur, if it were possible, I could best answer you by a little shrug of my shapely shoulders. Just imagine the gesture, if you please, and all the uncertainty that it implies."

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PROGRAMME FOR THE DAY.

A MOMENT later they succeeded in reaching La Travadeuse, and rescuing her from her perilous situation.

By the united strength of the two men and Retta, the overtopping mass was pressed toppling back.

Then there was a magnificent exertion of muscle on the part of the powerful and beautiful figure, still supine between the remaining fragments, which were slowly but steadily pushed apart by her strong, extended arms. And with a light, bird-like movement, she sprung out of their threatening embrace, leaving them to crash their jagged jaws harmlessly together, while she stood erect, smiling, free!

"*Mademoiselle et messieurs*," and she kissed her hand at her rescuers, "you have my heartfelt thanks. But it pains me to have to state, politely but firmly, that a repetition of this specially hazardous performance of mine must henceforth be indefinitely postponed."

Then she darted along through the passage, followed by the others, and not pausing until the pure, open air of the orchard was reached.

What a relief for all, but especially for those who had been so long confined in the noisome depths of the inner passage!

Some moments' respiration of the sweet, orchard air was required before a thorough recuperation all round was effected.

Then the question arose as to the immediate disposition of the treasure left behind in the bowels of the earth, so to speak, in conjunction with the ultimate exposure and arrest of Joseph Mervyn, which, it was generally decided upon, should be one of the first grand clearing-up measures for the near future.

"It is your fortune, Miss Mervyn," said the detective at last. "You should by rights have the first and abiding say in the question at issue."

"But it was through no exertions of mine that the fortune has been discovered," replied Retta, calmly, with a furtive and pardoning look in Mayfield's direction, which was not lost upon either the detective or Therese. "I decline to advance any opinion on the subject."

"But you will, at least, take a run back into the old cistern for a glance at your possessions?"

"Indeed, I shall not. I shall not pretend that I am not rejoiced to be rich once more—to come to my own again; but I prefer to leave the present puzzling matter wholly in your hands, sir."

"That will be best," said Therese. "But you must decide quickly, *mes enfants*. I am in haste to slip back home and change my habiliments before that dear good old Godlove shall suspect anything *outré*, for there will surely have been anxious inquiries by the bushel from my New York managers ere this."

Mayfield remained indifferent, while steadfastly avoiding Retta's attempts to catch his eye.

"I am to understand, then," said the detective, "that the complication is left wholly to my decision?"

Henriette bowed.

"This, then, is the programme for the day," continued the detective: "Madame Bertrande and I will make ourselves scarce, as the saying is, so as to afford Joseph Mervyn not the slightest suspicion that we have escaped the doom by suffocation that he so cleverly designed for us.

"Ditto for our friend Mayfield here. Then the three of us manage to be on hand at ten o'clock to-night to witness the villain's discomfiture when, in accordance with his suggestion to you, Miss Mervyn, he shall once more make his way down into the cistern by the cellar-way,

in the secret expectation of finding the three of us dead therein.

"His arrest will immediately follow his disappointment, as a matter of course. And we may even be so fortunate as to take advantage of his panic—though Joseph Mervyn isn't much given to panics, I must confess—to startle out of him a candid confession as to his having really murdered his cousin, Jacob Mervyn, in the so-called runaway accident of yesterday morning."

"What!" interrupted Retta, with an appalled look; "was that a murder, then?"

"In my own mind, there is not the slightest doubt of it."

"Great heavens! and I was alone with that terrible man in this forlorn place at that unseemly hour?"

"Miss Mervyn, you have had a narrow escape. However, think no more or that just now. How does my programme strike you so far as laid down?"

"Excellently well, sir. Indeed, I do not see how it could be improved."

"Good! Then the only remaining consideration is how to guard the treasure in the cistern till to-night; for we cannot safely carry it away with us just now, even if it were well to do so without certain legal and authoritative formalities, which it is far best should attend upon its transfer to some bank-vault in your name."

"True; I had forgotten about that."

"I propose, then, that one of our present number should remain hereabouts on guard over it."

"The very thing."

"And whomsoever shall be selected for that responsible duty can be supplied secretly with food and refreshment by yourself, eh?"

"Nothing can be better devised," said Henriette, composedly. "And, if he will but deign to accept, I shall select Mr. Mayfield for that responsible duty."

The young man looked up in supreme astonishment, his face flushing painfully.

"Retta—Miss Mervyn—you can't mean it?" he gasped.

"Of course I do."

"But you can't know all. Why, I have already proved myself a coward and a scoundrel in the affair!"

"Cowards and scoundrels never own up to being such."

"But you can't understand."

"Yes, I can."

"I have surreptitiously sneaked away with thirty thousand dollars, and more, of your money, and banked it in my own name, already."

She made an impatient gesture.

"Will you accept of the trust offered you, sir, or will you not?"

"Yes," half-doggedly, and after a final pause, "I do accept the trust, Miss Mervyn, and I shall answer for the inviolability of the remaining fortune with my life."

Therese had stood immovably during these interchanges, with a somewhat clouded brow; but she now started out of her silence with a forced laugh.

"Thank goodness it is all settled at last," she exclaimed. "Now I, for one at least, am off! But what am I to do for my promised music lesson to-day, *ma petite*?"

Retta looked up quickly.

"I had forgotten that?" she exclaimed. "How would it do," to the detective, "to still make my visit to Mrs. Godlove's ladies, just as though nothing had happened to interrupt my plans?"

"Shall you have nerve for it," he asked, "after attending to provisioning Mayfield for the day, and all that sort of thing?"

"I have never been lacking in nerve," she replied, simply.

"Then by all means do as you propose. Nothing would better serve to divert Joseph's suspicions, should you chance to meet him in the interim."

It was then so agreed.

Therese, still out of temper, but looking very attractive in her boyish dress, in spite of her rough experience in the underground passage, had turned abruptly, to go off alone.

"Wait, madame!" cried Henriette, impulsively running after her; "will you not let me kiss you before we separate?"

"No!" and La Travadeuse passionately broke away from the attempted embrace. "*Milles tonnerres de Diable!* what do you think I am made of?"

Retta drew back in bewilderment and alarm.

"What is the matter?" she faltered.

"I hate you!—it is that which matters. Remember, though, I do not let you off from the promised music lesson."

And with that Therese darted away like a deer, and was almost instantly lost to sight.

Henriette remained for a moment completely mystified.

Then, as her eyes wandered from the detective to Mayfield, who was once more hanging his head in an abashed, shame-faced way, the true state of the emotional complication was revived in her mind, and a deep blush overspread her countenance.

"Oh, I had yet again forgotten!" she murmured. "Come, Mr. Detective Officer; if you will kindly see me as far as Mrs. Kelly's cottage I shall be much obliged."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

BOARDING-HOUSE TACTICS.

LA TRAVADEUSE, who was an unusually shrewd young woman, had managed to return to her room in the *maison* Godlove, and effect the much-needed change in her costume, apparently without attracting attention, when there was a knock at her door.

"Is it you, Mignon, *cherie*?" she called out from her dressing-case.

"It is not your daughter, ma'm, but your humble servant," responded the familiar and slightly sarcastic voice of the pretty boarding-house mistress. "Could you kindly deign to exchange a few words with me, ma'm?"

With a species of ecstatic shriek, Therese flew to the door, tore it open, and caught Mrs. Godlove in her arms, with a comical pretense of affectionate exuberance.

"Oh, you darling old fossil!" she screamed, embracing her; "just the dear, kindly old frump I was longing to see. Come right in!"

When Mrs. Godlove recovered her breath it was with a sparkle of indignation in her pretty cheeks and prettier eyes, for she had been plumped by main force into the adventuress's best chair amid a pile of feminine gear, but a slight revenge was in her reach.

"Do control your high spirits, ma'm—so unaffectedly youthful, I am sure!" she said, politely. "Ah, I can now understand the fellow feeling that makes you persist in twitting me with my thirty-four years as something so inex-pressibly ancient!"

And with a gesture she indicated Therese's *rouge* pots and powder-boxes, not to mention in detail the toilette paraphernalia in view.

Therese, who was just fitting on her bustle, preparatory to donning an elegant morning wrap of a rich rose color and extravagant embroideries, kissed her visitor yet again.

"That's right," she whispered—"a feminine privilege, you know, you dear old thing, and you really don't show that you are withered. I myself," in a confidential whisper, "pass for but seventeen—at least nine years less than my actual age, if a day."

"Is it possible?" But here Mrs. Godlove's eyes fell upon the boy's costume, not yet thrust out of sight, and she pretended a shocked air: "But what is this, ma'm? You have then received a youthful visitor, who has even ventured—" she had come to a horrified pause.

"Ventured to change his clothes in my room, you would say?" supplemented La Travadeuse, with a laugh. "No, no, mamma (I may call you mamma, may I not?) Not quite so bad as that. I was a boy myself for the greater part of the night, and that make-up from my Carnival days in Paris came in right handy, you must know."

At last there was a chance for the indignation that was boiling in Mrs. Godlove's ordinarily gentle breast, and she quickly took advantage of it.

"I was aware that you were out all night, ma'm, and not in keeping with the requirements of your profession," she exclaimed. "But you don't mean to tell me that you have masqueraded abroad in that unseemly attire?"

"But I do, Goddy; and we made quite a night of it. How does my skirt fall, if you please? And just see if you mayn't be sitting on my curling-tongs. No, here they are. Don't disturb yourself."

"Making a night of it!" was all that Mrs. Godlove could echo, with a dazed and helpless air.

Therese nodded gayly; and just here *La Sauterelle* came hopping into the room, flushed from her lawn exercise.

"Maman, maman! you are back again?" cried the child, running forward for her accustomed embrace.

"Yes, my dear. There! But run along now—that is, if you shouldn't wish to kiss Grandmamma Godlove, too."

"I sha'n't run along, and I sha'n't kiss anybody," cried Mignon, in rebellious half-French and half-English. "And I want some champagne, or a brandy and soda, I don't care which. Where have you been all night, mama?" And what pretty boy was it the *femme de chambre* saw slipping in here half an hour ago?"

"My child, excessive inquisitiveness, no less than disobedience, should be repressed in the very young."

And *muman* coolly proceeded to administer a spanking with such Spartan vigor and earnestness as speedily sent The Grasshopper whimpering and bawling down-stairs again.

"Neither was Mr. Mayfield in his own bed last night," said Mrs. Godlove, in a solemn and rather shaking voice. "He hasn't even got home yet."

"Correct, my dear," was the imperturbably smiling rejoinder. "And how about Major Falconbridge, the great detective, who engaged a room of you, I believe?"

"He also failed to occupy his bed."

Therese clapped her hands.

"Oh, but we had a night of it!" she cried. "But isn't luncheon nearly on? I am half-famished."

"Very likely. A night of it! What, with two gentlemen?"

"The more the merrier, my dear."

"Madame Bertrande, I have put up with your irregularities thus far, but I can do so no longer!" Mrs. Godlove had now risen, and was pale and resolute. "This—this shamelessness must be stopped."

"Wait a minute, grandmamma."

Therese ran to a little private refrigerator, which she kept in one corner of her room, and was back again in an instant, with a half-bottle of champagne under either arm, and a couple of goblets in her hands.

"Just hold the glasses, while I pop the corks, Goddy," she said, naively. "I know you must be just dying for a stomach-cooler."

If eyes were daggers that could kill, Mrs. Godlove's would surely have stabbed the human cannon-ball to death then and there, as she started back.

"Woman!" she exclaimed, "you must know that I never drink."

"Is it possible? Well, I do."

And, seating herself leisurely, Therese cheerfully proceeded to dispose of one bottle after the other in her most *insouciant* manner.

"Ah, my dear lady," she murmured, "you surely cannot know what a treat you are missing. Wine, wine, amber wine! watch it froth and watch it shine—when the bubbles brim on the beaker's rim, and break on the lips while drinking. By the way, shall I tell you of our last night's adventure, my dear?"

Mrs. Godlove's curiosity was even superior to her sense of outraged self-respect.

"I suppose so," she replied, plumping back into her chair again.

"But can you keep a secret, my dear?"

"If not too wicked—yes."

"Can you keep my secret?"

"Yes, Madame Bertrande."

"You are quite sure you can keep my secret as to our doings of last night?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, so can I.—Good morning, my dear Mrs. Godlove; and if you hurry up luncheon by half-an-hour, I sha'n't complain. Wait! you are looking so worn and wrinkled that my rouge is quite at your disposal, and—"

But Mrs. Godlove had already flounced furiously out of the room, and the mad merriment of Therese's silvery laugh was allowed to fill out the unfinished bantering.

"That woman is simply unendurable," muttered Mrs. Godlove, as she made her way down stairs. "But if I can't get rid of her, I can at least watch her goings and comings hereafter, like a cat, and I shall do it. Heavens! if I thought that Mr. Mayfield, that poor virtuous young man, were already in the clutches of that handsome witch, who will assuredly never see her thirtieth birthday again, or I am no judge—"

Here she was interrupted by a ring at the door-bell, and drew back from the foot of the main staircase to perceive the servant admit a very beautiful and modest-looking young lady, accompanied by a professional-looking old gentleman, with bushy white whiskers and a pair of spectacles.

"Is Mrs. Godlove in?" asked the young lady's companion in a very harsh, rasping voice that almost set one's teeth on edge.

The servant gave an affirmative.

"And Madame Bertrande?"

"She answers for herself," cried a joyous voice from the top of the stairs.

And then its owner, Therese herself, came rushing down, and the beautiful young lady was clasped in her arms.

"Oh, Miss Merrivale, how kind of you to come so soon! But you shall take luncheon with me before you think of opening the piano. Come into the parlor. Is the gentleman your papa?"

No; Retta's companion was introduced as Mr. Major, an old friend. And at this point Mrs. Godlove also came forward and made the acquaintance of the new-comers.

They had entered the drawing-room, where Henriette, having responded to the ladies' greetings with charming frankness, stepped up to the piano which was standing invitingly open at one side of the room.

Seating herself at the instrument with unassuming composure, she struck out a few chords; and then, being a born musician, suddenly dashed off into the intricacies of a grand and masterly composition, with a *verve* and brilliancy that speedily crowded the room doors with eager, fair listeners from all over the house.

It was a treat.

The piece was finished, and the young instructress enlarged her acquaintance with but little ceremony.

Therese clapped her hands.

"*Mademoiselle est capable, est charmante!*" she cried. "Mon Dieu! I couldn't play much better myself."

And, seating herself at the instrument, she improvised a series of purposed discordances

that amused everybody, with the single exception of Mrs. Godlove, as a matter of course, who invariably chose to be secretly scandalized by every one of the Bertrande caprices, which had by this time become quite a toleration, if not a positive entertainment, with every one else.

Mr. Major was especially overwhelmed by La Travadeuse's charming extravagances, and raspingly declared that he had even seen her shot out of her cannon in the circus with less satisfaction than he viewed her musical proficiency.

Then Henriette also vouchsafed a specimen of her vocal powers in a very sweet ballad, to a pretty accompaniment, which was scarcely less of a revelation than her playing had been; and when luncheon was announced, a little later, it was apparent that she had created a most excellent first impression in her favor.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

RETTA'S ESCORT.

AFTER luncheon Therese received her lessons, there was more music vouchsafed by Miss Merrivale, and more than a dozen well-to-do ladies, including Mrs. Godlove, were anxious to engage instruction, though she could as yet promise nothing for certain, she said, as to her future movements.

Then, somewhat on into the afternoon, there was quite a garden-party in the picturesque grounds overlooking the river from the back of the house, where Therese at last, notwithstanding the jealous watchfulness of Mrs. Godlove, managed to get a few words with Retta alone.

"I am so glad to speak with you," she exclaimed, leading the way toward a rather secluded little summer-house. "But, *le diable!*" looking back; "is this old Mr. Major, with a beard like a superannuated fox and a voice like a cracked trumpet, your *alter ego*, that he is everywhere at your heels? There he is again, watching us like a spectacled-hawk from that arbor!"

Retta also looked back and laughed.

"You shouldn't complain," she replied. "The poor old man has had no eyes save for you from the first."

"Admiration is well enough in its way, *ma chere*, but can be dispensed with on occasion—save on the part of the one man and the right man, as a matter of course. But who is your antediluvian old friend—who might tie well enough with the Godlove for that matter."

"You are unjust to Mrs. Godlove, ma'm," said Retta, smiling. "From your previous allusions to her, I had more than half-expected to find her a sedate and not very agreeable old lady."

"Well, and how do you find her?"

A still beautiful woman, quite on the right side of forty, and with very lovely dark eyes; though she does appear somewhat disconcerted or jealous, by nature, I must confess."

"A she-dragon, my dear—a fossil of the stone-age—a monster from the depths!"

"It isn't right for you to disparage another so unjustly," said the young girl, gravely. "Indeed, it is not, ma'm. You wrong your own beauty by doing so."

"Petite, you are a fool! If I didn't despise that woman, I would honor her with my august hatred."

"You said at our last parting, that you hated me."

"It was the truth, *chere petite*. I did and do hate you virulently, and for the same reason."

Retta blushed and looked pained, for she now remembered also what Mayfield had once told her regarding the pretty widow's infatuation.

"I don't like to be hated," she said, simply. "It is very sad!"

Therese kissed her, with one of her abrupt laughs, which there was no divining the exact meaning of.

"You haven't told me who your ancient escort, with a cracked-trumpet voice is," she cried.

"Is it possible, then, that you still fail to recognize him?"

"Recognize that Wandering Jew of a man!" and Therese again faced about toward the old gentleman under discussion, who still stood in a rapt or mock-rapt attitude at the door of the little arbor. "I?"

"Yes."

"Of course not, my dear. I never saw the enchanted old ape before, though of course I am in ecstasies to have fascinated him."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite."

"Step this way, Mr. Major!" called out Henriette; and the summons was amiably, not to say nimbly, obeyed. "Here is Madame Bertrande saying the most uncomplimentary things about you, and stoutly averring that she never saw you before."

Mr. Major, rubbing his hands together and his whiskered face a whole garden of ambushed smiles, had danced rather than stepped forward with an excess of demonstrative gallantry that caused La Travadeuse to beam maliciously.

"He must be a Frenchman," she said, *sotto voce*. "None other could caper and curvet in this way at his age."

"She says you are a Frenchman of necessity,

Mr. Major," repeated Retta, smiling. "And is, moreover, still positive she never saw you before."

Mr. Major merely bowed with his hand on his heart, and his eyes uprolled with a mute adoration from a shrug of the shoulders so exaggerated that Therese could not avoid laughing cut-right.

"Ah, madame, it is my delicious privilege to amuse you, then?" mandered the cracked voice, in an apparently vain effort to modulate itself to a blandishing softness. "Then I am too happy to complain of madame's briefness of memory, notwithstanding that she was my close companion—though in a companionship that was somewhat compulsory, as I must admit—not twelve hours ago."

"If?" cried Therese, still bewildered beyond suspecting the truth. "Surely you rave, monsieur!"

"But aren't we all tempted to rave at times, under certain harsh vicissitudes of adversity, Belle Therese?" And now the cracked-trumpet was no longer present in the gentleman's pleasant voice.

She gave a little scream.

"Oh, mon Dieu! it is you, then, Monsieur Vieux Faucon? Mais c'est merveilleux, c'est incroyable!"

"It should be quite believable by this time though you must not more than hint of it again, and but softly at that," replied the disguised detective, while Retta laughed heartily at Therese's expense. "However, your heretofore ignorance is the best compliment you could pay to my make-up, my dear Whirlwind, howsoever unflattering may have been your personal comments."

"Oh, it is grand, it is perfect!" cried Therese, clapping her hands. "But tell me, you two," in a lower voice, as they all moved toward a yet more secluded portion of the grounds, overlooking the railroad and the river's edge, "what is the meaning of it all?"

"Doesn't it appear on its face that our pet villain, Joseph Mervyn, must be kept in the dark till to-night?"

"Ah, I understand; he must still imagine us to be suffocated in the cistern, eh?"

"Of course."

"And where is he now?"

"Still in this neighborhood, I opine. At all events, his cousin's remains were dispatched to New York this morning, and Joseph was not the person who accompanied them."

"And the dear little Mayfield—*mon cher Harvee?*"

"Mr. Mayfield is doubtless faring comfortably where we left him on guard," Henriette took it upon herself to seriously reply. "I managed to convey to him a capital basket of provisions from the larder of the best restaurant in Yonkers before getting myself ready to accompany the major on this musical jaunt, in order to keep my promise to you, Madame Bertrande. By the way, that reminds me of something." And she took on a look of uneasiness.

"What are you reminded of, *petite?*"

"Why, I told Joseph Mervyn, you know—I shall never allude to that man as my cousin again—that I would defer my visit hither, and now, should he know of my having returned to my original intention, he might suspect something wrong."

"*Parle du diable et le voici!*" ["Talk of the devil and he appears!"] exclaimed Therese, in an undertone.

And then Joseph Mervyn himself was perceived advancing toward the group, with a smiling face and a nonchalant air.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BY THE RAILROAD.

THE part of the house grounds to which the trio had strayed directly adjoined a small public park at this point, which was a sufficient explanation of Joseph Mervyn's unlooked-for appearance.

Moreover, he seemed to be but moderately surprised at perceiving Retta's presence, and, after exchanging a bow with Therese and undergoing an introduction to "Mr. Major," merely said, pleasantly:

"You were then induced to change your mind, as to visiting Tarrytown to-day, Miss Merrivale?"

"Yes," replied Henriette, composedly taking her cue. "I remembered my promise to Madame Bertrande; and then besides an unexpected escort chanced to offer himself in the person of my friend, Mr. Major here."

Mr. Major grimaced, grinned, shrugged his shoulders and adjusted his spectacles, and Joseph, after a suspicious glance, evidently set him down as merely a harmless oddity, though of course he could not but continue puzzled as to how Henriette, in her work-girl character, could have formed such an acquaintance.

However, the detective's black-eyed boy companion of the cistern adventure was still to be accounted for in Mervyn's plotting mind, and, as he took the liberty of joining the trio in their stroll, Therese found his eyes more than once fixed upon her with an uncomfortable scrutiny, though of course she was equal to any emergency.

"By the way, Madame Bertrande," he said, after a few minutes' general chat, "you ought to be careful about cheating the public of your anticipated performances, or even your popularity might receive a check."

"And how do you know, *mon fils*, that I missed my performance last night?" she asked.

"By the morning newspapers, as a matter of course. There was quite a sensation at the great show. The manager's excuses for you were received with a storm of disapproval, and it was some time before the spectators could be appeased."

"Yes: my cannon-ball act is not easily replaced with anything inferior in the dear public's estimation," observed La Travadeuse, complacently. "However, could they have known how frightfully ill in bed I was all night, and until a few hours ago, some sympathy might have been extended up this way."

"Ah, you were ill all night, then?"

"Appallingly! Ah!"

She cleverly simulated a sudden pallor, and, leaning against a tree, seized Retta's arm for support, while secretly telegraphing to the disguised detective by a look, which was fortunately understood and acted upon.

The latter instantly button-holed Mervyn a little apart, and began to pour forth a description, from report, of Therese's recent imaginary sufferings, with such crack-voiced grotesqueness of details as to engross his unwilling attention for the moment, while Therese hurriedly whispered to Retta:

"He evidently wants to get a private word with you. Oblige him at once, and, above all, don't let him make Godlove's acquaintance, or we are lost. Ah, *mon Dieu!* there's the woman now."

Mrs. Godlove had, indeed, just put in an appearance not far away, together with one of her lady boarders and the irrepressible Mignon, and was even sauntering in the direction of the group.

Henriette only understood that something was to be done decisively, and she did not hesitate.

"Mr. Major, look at that child on the railroad track up yonder," she said, quickly advancing to the two men, and giving the detective a significant look. "Is it not in some peril, think you?"

"I should say so!" exclaimed the quick-witted Mr. Major, in a voice like a fog-horn, and with a glance in the opportune direction indicated. "Ha! there's a warning engine whistle even now."

And away he dashed along the overhanging bank, tumultuously followed by La Travadeuse, who neglected not to communicate her excitement to Mrs. Godlove and carry her, together with Mignon and the lady companion, along toward the somewhat distant point.

Retta had remained rooted to the spot, with wide eyes and paling cheeks, for the peril of the child was by no means imaginary.

But for all that her ruse had been successful, and Joseph was saved from a chance chat with Mrs. Godlove, which might have given away the secret of Therese's 'irregularity' with regard to the boy's costume, to the consequent enlightenment of Mervyn as to the real situation averted the cistern adventure.

"A fortunate diversion—at least for me!" exclaimed Joseph, who had regarded the incident with unmitigated contempt, and he advanced eagerly to the young girl. "It is highly important that I should exchange a few words with you, Cousin Retta, unperceived by your new friend, Mr. Major, and that brazen hussy of a French mountebank."

"You should not allude to Mrs. Bertrande in that coarse way," replied Retta, quietly, but nevertheless leading the way into a comparatively shaded by-path as an intimation of acceding to his request—a concession that seemed to please him not a little. "What more is it that you would say to me?"

"Pardon my inquisitiveness, cousin," said he, already presuming too eagerly on the complacency accorded; "but this odd gentleman, Mr. Major? An old acquaintance, perhaps?"

"Not an old one, but a gentleman in whom I have something more than a passing confidence," was the cold response. "But excuse me, cousin"—she had declared that she would not again address him as such, but forced herself to reconsider her decision in the interest of getting rid of him, in accordance with La Travadeuse's warning—"if you only wish to ask me trivial questions, I scarcely understand your request for a few words in private."

"Oh, forgive me!" he hastened to make amends. "I wouldn't offend you for the world. You see, it was merely to confer with you upon one point in our agreement for to-night's work—"

He was interrupted by a suppressed cry on Retta's part, and instinctively followed the direction of her eyes, which were filled with a suddenly startled and suspenseful look.

They had partly descended the green, sloping bluff overbrowsing the railroad to a little grove, at a considerable distance back toward the public grounds from which Joseph had first put in an appearance, and yet which commanded a

more complete view of the narrow, iron-railed perspective than was commanded by the higher situation they had quitted.

The little child—evidently from some one or another of the rough laborers' shanties near at hand—was to be seen still playing fearlessly in the middle of the down-track.

The young girl's frightened exclamation had been evoked by the apparition of a down Express train, which had just made its appearance around a curve, and was dashing full upon the unconscious urchin, with every probability of killing it in another instant.

As it was, she could only clasp her hands and look on in supreme horror.

Far along the bank stood Therese, Mrs. Godlove and some other ladies, likewise transfixed with horror, and gazing down helplessly at the anticipated tragedy, the scene of which was almost directly under their feet.

Another screech from the engine, now not ten rods from the child!

The engineer has perceived the situation—his hand is on the throttle, he has already signaled a reversion of the flying wheels—but it is too late.

The impetus is too great to be counterchecked.

The locomotive slows up just perceptibly, but is already upon the child, the cruel cow-catcher rushing on its prey like a giant spear.

But, no! A flash down the steep slope, from where the ladies are standing, a rivulet of speed made by Mr. Major's white hair and whiskers along the green bluff, a flying leap of the intervening ditch, and the child is snatched from the very jaws of death!

There is an admiring shout from the engine, and as the train sweeps past, revealing Mr. Major again to the spectators, the urchin unharmed, though kicking and squalling lustily, in his arms, notwithstanding that he has lost one of his coat-tails, which is fluttering from the baffled cow-catcher as it disappears around a curve.

"What an unmitigated ass!" exclaimed Joseph Mervyn, with a contemptuous laugh.

It was said before he had noticed that Retta had buried her face in her hands, and was softly sobbing out her gratitude for what had chanced.

She turned upon him like a fury.

"An ass, you say, for risking his life for another?" she sobbed, indignantly. "Is that what you mean?"

"Not exactly, Cousin Retta," he temporized.

"But the child was nothing (*probably* nothing,) with a subtle sneer) "to the old fellow who has so narrowly escaped his own death in snatching it back to life—a dirty-faced imp, a common laborer's child!"

"So much the more noble and unselfish the deed!" with a curling lip. "But no matter," impatiently, and drying her tears as she slowly led the way yet deeper into the little grove. "You were about to say when we were interrupted—what?"

"Oh!" and he also was glad to dismiss a subject that had evoked his brutal cynicism into so unattractive a light. "Well, cousin, I think it was ten o'clock to-night that we fixed upon for revisiting the old cistern?"

"Yes," she briefly assented, with yet averted head.

"Well, I wished to suggest if an hour or two earlier would not be better substituted—say eight o'clock, or about dusk?"

"No, I think not."

"I thought the earlier hour might better suit your convenience."

"It might—my mere convenience." She suddenly turned upon him a face in which she had managed to throw a good deal of fictitious horror and fear; for she did not disdain to dissimilate in this man's presence. "I—I do not wish for an earlier hour, however."

"But why?"

"Can you not imagine?"

"I confess that I cannot. It will be a more convenient and seasonable hour, in every way, for the transfer of the hidden funds to some bank vault, or some other place of absolute security."

"And that is all?" her apparent distress was now quite pitiable.

"Why do you look that way, cousin? Oh, I remember! The release of Mayfield and his companions from the cistern-pit?"

"Yes, yes."

"But I should think that would cause you to hasten the hour yet the more."

She shuddered, and once more turned away her face.

"Yes; if I thought their deliverance were not long ere this past hope."

"What?" eagerly; "you fear that we shall find them suffocated?"

"Yes, yes! Ah, my God!"

"And would therefore defer until the last moment the hour of uncovering their dead bodies?"

"Yes, yes! Oh, the thought is horrible! I fear I permitted you to deceive me as to the cistern having sufficient ventilation to keep them alive."

A fresh and gloating joy took possession of him. She evidently suspected the truth, or what he was absolutely sure was the truth. Mayfield,

the accursed detective, and the youthful unknown would assuredly be found dead amid the treasure-boxes. She believed this, too, and could still speak with comparative complacency with him, their murderer—could still contemplate the tragic disclosure in store for her without shrinking away from him in supreme horror and disgust! Good! Then her fancy for Mayfield must, indeed, have been transient and superficial; and he, Joseph Mervyn, was in reality without a rival, after all.

"I think you will find that your fears are without foundation," he said, with hypocritical earnestness. "Still, twenty hours, or thereabouts, is a long time to live and breathe entombed in such a hole."

"Ah!" with a sort of gasp, "you acknowledge that?"

"I must do so. Still," quite cheerfully, "I continue to hope for the best, for your sake."

"Thank you," in a low voice.

"Then you think it best to adhere to the hour originally fixed?"

"Yes."

"Good, then. So be it. I shall call at Mrs. Kelly's for you at, say, a quarter to ten."

"You may do so."

"Good-by till then." He was holding out his hand.

She placed her own in its palm without a perceptible shudder, so rejoiced was she to have him take himself off.

He paused an instant with her hand in his, then pressed it wildly to his lips, and, with a last gloating look, disappeared in the direction of the public square, whose boundary was once more near at hand.

Nevertheless, as Henriette, with a feeling of inexplicable relief, turned out of the grove and up the rising bank to rejoin Therese and the detective, Joseph watched her retreating figure from a distance with a sinister and yet satisfied gaze.

"I shall, nevertheless, be beforehand with you at the corpse-guarded treasure-cave, my fair cousin," he muttered to himself. "Time enough between dusk of evening and two hours later on in which to feather my individual nest pretty thoroughly with a portion of the funds; though all will doubtless be mine when I shall have made you my wife, as I swear you shall one day be—fate willing and the devil not objecting!"

With that he turned off through the public grounds, and swiftly strode away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

AN UNLOOKED - FOR EVENT.

As the twilight shadows began to thicken over the neglected orchard of the haunted cottage, Harvey Mayfield, who had kept his guard with tireless conscientiousness throughout the day, began one of his regular rounds of observation from the mouth of the secret passage roundabout the immediate vicinity of the house.

Scarcely had he cast his eyes toward the public road before he remarked the figure of a man stealthily coming up the walk.

Something instinctively told him that this man was Joseph Mervyn, though it was too dark to distinguish his face.

He immediately slipped behind a tree, with his eyes riveted on the approaching figure.

"I can divine the scoundrel's object," he said to himself. "In spite of his appointment with Retta for the later hour, he would first line his own pockets secretly from the treasure; and doubtless even the thought of his having to encounter our three supposed dead bodies in the cistern-hole does not trouble him in the least. Ah, I thought so!"

The man had turned off to go around to the back door, and now his features were plainly distinguishable as those of Joseph Mervyn.

But suddenly, much to the watching Mayfield's astonishment, another figure started up in the first one's path, and sternly confronted him, cudgel in hand.

In another instant, after the rapid exchange of a few words, whose purport Mayfield could not catch, these two men were engaged in a desperate hand-to-hand conflict.

It was speedily ended by the repeated flash of a knife in the dimness, and then the cudgel-wielder was seen to fall, without a groan.

The victor leaned over his fallen victim, seemed to be satisfied that life was extinct, and then, wiping his reeking knife on the matted turf at the side of the path, stole on to the kitchen door with much increased stealthiness, as if half anticipating a fresh interruption.

As he disappeared into the house, Mayfield, both mystified and appalled, hurriedly slipped away from his own concealment and examined the motionless figure lying on the grass.

The man was quite dead, having been twice ruthlessly stabbed in the region of the heart.

A man of forty, or thereabouts, with dark and sinister, though not unintelligent, features, frozen now in an impotent scowl; roughly and poorly dressed, apparently in cast-off garments never intended for him; and with shapely, delicate hands, betokening, however, recent hard toil to which they could scarcely have been thoroughly accustomed.

Suddenly the explanation of this mystery flashed into the young man's brain, like a revelation.

This man was perhaps one of Jem Burkitt's two pals who had assisted him in the robbery, and he had been on guard outside the cottage, doubtless while the other one was at work in the cellars, unearthing the treasure they had helped Burkitt to bury away there more than a twelvemonth previous.

The pals, he remembered, were Brummagem Bob, whom he had seen apparently at the point of death in the Sing Sing prison hospital, but who had (according to information vouchsafed by Old Falcon, the detective) subsequently recovered, and the master-criminal of the trio, Manning Grayton, otherwise the Centerbit, who had been doing a life-term in the New Jersey State Prison. The pair had doubtless joined each other, after effecting their several escapes, and met on this fateful occasion for the purpose of getting at their ill-gotten gains. The dead man was Grayton, inasmuch as his face was wholly unfamiliar to Mayfield, who remembered Brummagem Bob's personality quite distinctly; and the worker inside, over whose operations he had thought to stand guard, was doubtless Bob himself.

This solution of the mystery came upon Mayfield, as has been intimated, in a single flash.

Then came the slower after-thought, the humiliating reflection: "What sort of lynx-eyed, bull-dog guard must I have kept over the charge intrusted to my fidelity, when these two jail-birds have been able to carry on and almost mature their operations, so to speak, under my very nose?"

Mayfield could not abstain from scratching his head and indulging in self-reproachful, if not self-contemptuous, reflections, the very reverse of comforting or reassuring.

"However," he thought to himself, in a consolatory way, "let me not forget that these escaped convicts, besides being more wary and cunning than the average, must necessarily have overreached the systematized guards of two State Prisons before they effected a similarly hoodwinking process in my own unprofessional and unsophisticated case."

With such poor comfort as was to be extracted from this line of thought, he made no more delay, but drew his revolver, and noiselessly followed Joseph Mervyn into the haunted cottage, in comparative readiness for witnessing yet another interruption of the latter's intentions, with regard to which Joseph himself could have but vague premonitions.

Mayfield was not disappointed.

The dull sounds of a pick and spade at work in the small north cellar could be heard at the head of the steps.

Joseph Mervyn had doubtless already heard them, and stolen down the steps to investigate.

Grasping his revolver yet more resolutely, Mayfield followed.

In the second or middle cellar he came to an observant pause.

Standing crouchingly at the opposite doorway, and gazing so intently into the north cellar beyond as to be wholly oblivious of any danger to his rear, was Joseph Mervyn, knife in hand.

Mayfield could see directly over him into the further compartment, which was quite brightly lighted by two lanterns, swinging from nails in the wall over the bowed head of a man busily at work in the ground over the buried cistern lid, more than half of the last excavation being already more than half emptied.

The worker had thrown off his coat, to the revelation of a coarse prison undershirt underneath.

He presently desisted from his work in order to wipe his dripping brow on his sleeve.

The coarse features thus upturned to the light were instantly recognized by Mayfield as those of the convict, Tip Barker, alias Brummagem Bob, notwithstanding that they were now in far sturdier guise than when he had last seen them staring up, so white and emaciated, from their hospital pillow.

"Drat the job!" the fellow was heard to soliloquize aloud, as, half in the hole, he leaned pantingly on the handle of his spade. "An' yet it looks as though the ground ought to have settled more solid-like in this 'ere hole since more'n a year. The Lord knows how Centrebit an' me an' poor Jem stamped it down arter we had planted the swag! Howsomever, it will only show up the more sweet-like for only the pair on us to divide."

He once more bent to his work, but had hardly driven the spade again into the loose earth before Joseph Mervyn pounced upon him without a word, and buried the knife into his shoulder.

The surprised convict uttered a half-yell of mingled fright and bewilderment, but, being a powerful and courageous man, leaped almost instantly up out of the trench, and, though desperately wounded and unarmed, engaged his assailant in a terrific struggle for the mastery.

For the moment, Mayfield could only look on, helplessly appalled, and not knowing what to think or do.

The struggle was brief, though bloody. Howsoever the inferior of his convict adversary in

strength and even address, Joseph, besides being the sole possessor of a deadly weapon, seemed inspired with a ruthless and murderous desperation on the verge of maniacal frenzy.

Steadily, swiftly, again and again from out of the whirling, stamping, reeling combat, the knife-blade rose and fell, and was apparently driven home.

At last Joseph stumbled backward, measuring his full length into the bottom of the trench, with the form of the convict on top of him.

But the latter had received his death-stroke at last. A gasp, a groan, and a final tremor of the limbs, and all was over.

Laboriously ridding himself of his horrid burden, and leaving the murdered man's body in the pit in lieu of his own, Joseph scrambled to his feet, and looked down over his person with a string of muttered oaths.

Though unwounded, he was literally covered with blood from head to foot.

His face, however, though frightfully pale, was stern and remorseless still, its only modifying expression being a look of keen disappointment.

"A pretty figure, truly, to escort a young lady into the enjoyment of her new-found fortune!" he muttered, loudly enough for the servant and horrified Mayfield to distinguish the words. "Curse the luck! who could have foreseen such a beastly double interruption? This will knock out my original plan of feathering my own nest out of the swag before affording Henriette a glimpse of it down below there—doubtless with the corpses of the suffocated trio holding solemn guard over it. But, worse than that, how shall I rid myself of these gory stains, and at the same time be prepared to explain this new complication to Henriette? Curse it! what shall I do?"

He threw away the bloody knife, which until now he had kept mechanically clutched in his hand, and, seating himself upon the heap of upturned earth, after daintily choosing a spot bearing no marks of the encounter, fell to thinking hard.

Presently his face cleared.

"I have it!" he exclaimed. "Rather a rough remedy, I fancy, but infinitely better than none at all."

He rose determinedly, seized one of the lanterns, and passed with it through an adjoining cellar, too absorbed in his new purpose to look either to the right or left.

Otherwise he might have noticed the horrified Mayfield, crouched far to one side, in a remote corner, but with his revolver in readiness for use should he be discovered.

Mayfield heard the murderer pass on up the rickety steps; and then, a few minutes later, heard him retracing his way much more slowly and laboriously, as though trailing a heavy and cumbersome burden.

The criminal's fresh object was speedily apparent.

When he repassed through the middle cellar, he was bearing in his arms, while still retaining hold of the lantern, the dead body of the convict who had been so suddenly killed in the pathway above.

Mayfield again curiously peered into the little north cellar, as Joseph disappeared with his ghastly burden therein, and watched what followed with no little curiosity intermingled with his horror.

Flinging down the corpse, Joseph coolly and methodically proceeded to change clothing with it.

His first victim had bled comparatively little, from the one sure thrust that had so abruptly sent him to his last account, so that his garments, though ill-fitting and threadbare, were not perceptibly stained.

In the course of half an hour the cunning murderer had effected the desired change somewhat to his satisfaction.

The greater part of his own outer garments, which had been bled out of all recognition of their original fine quality and fashionable cut, were transferred to the dead man; while the latter's poor apparel was utilized for the recovering of his own person, which thereby assuredly looked more presentable though somewhat more uncouth than before.

He then picked up the knife, and, after depositing the body at the edge of the excavation, doubled its lifeless hand around the hilt, so as to make it appear that both convicts had died in a terrible struggle with each other, the one in the bottom of the pit by repeated blows, and the other as if by falling accidentally upon his own knife in the moment of assured victory.

"There!" muttered the murderer, contemplating his work with a grim smile. "It might be better, but I fancy I shall be able to make it do. Now a little water to cleanse these red stains from my hands, and it will doubtless be time to set out for my appointment with Henriette."

He consulted his watch.

"The deuce! nearly half-past nine already?"

He turned on his heel and rapidly quitted the awful scene, Mayfield shrinking, unobserved as before, into a dark corner, as the scoundrel again strode through the middle cellar.

CHAPTER XL.

JOSEPH MERVYN'S CLEVERNESS.

THE murderer had once more carried off one of the lanterns up-stairs, and Mayfield heard him moving around in the kitchen for some moments longer, as though occupied with cleansing the blood-stains from his hands.

Then he heard the outer door open and shut, followed by retreating footfalls upon the path, after which all was dead silence.

Then and then only did the appalled young man venture to creep away from the horrid proximity of the tragedy, and grope his way up the steps.

He was no coward, but his breeding and pursuits had alike unfitted him for familiarity with such ghastly scenes, and, as he reached the kitchen, in which the murderer had left the lantern burning, he was frightfully pale, the hand in which he still held the pistol, trembled like a leaf, and he also experienced the strange nausea that is sometimes found to accompany an extreme nervous shock with delicate and refined temperaments.

He glanced but once around the neglected kitchen, while thrusting his revolver out of sight, in a dazed, half-stupefied way, as if uncertain whether what he had witnessed was not the result of some hideous nightmare dream, from which he might presently awake into more pleasing environments.

But no; all was real—horribly, appallingly, paralyzingly real!

Then from that chamber and that mansion he fled aghast.

He did not come to a pause until he reached the end of the path at the roadway gate.

There, under the sweet starlight, with the full moon just putting in a placid appearance over the eastern hills, and the cooling night-air fanning his throbbing brows, his self-possession gradually returned to him.

He even felt disposed at last to deride his recent agitation, and yet felt that nothing on earth could induce him to enter that fateful cottage, unaccompanied, again.

After a long rest at the gate, he decided to make a detour through the orchard to the mouth of the underground passage, but had hardly started to do so when the approach of wheels along the road arrested his attention.

A moment later a buggy drew up at the gate, and Old Falcon and Therese—both in disguise, though the latter had retained the species of garments appropriate to her sex—lightly descended from it, greeting the young man with cheerful welcoming words.

"Treasure all safe, eh?" queried the detective, after leading his horse under the deep shadow of a clump of trees on the opposite side of the road.

"Oh, yes!"

"And we are on time, eh?"

"Joseph Mervyn and Miss Henrietta have not come here together yet, according to their agreement, if that is what you mean."

"Of course it is what I mean, Mr. Mayfield. But Joseph has been here alone, however. Eh?"

"Yes; how do you know that?"

"Gad! we met him in a dog-cart twenty minutes back. He was doubtless on his way back, with the intention of calling for Miss Mervyn. But he did not recognize us, though we did him, notwithstanding that he had also got himself up for the occasion, and in the oddest shape!"

Therese burst into a laugh.

"How any liveryman trusted him with his equipage in that disguise I can't understand," she exclaimed. "Parbleu! Professor Josephs was looking more like a tramp than anything else."

Here she gave a little scream, for the moonlight for the first time showed her the expression of Mayfield's face.

"Mon Dieu! what is it, mon ami?" she cried. "You look horribly!"

Old Falcon had also perceived the young man's excessive haggardness, and turned to him for an explanation.

Mayfield bri fly, but graphically, related what there was to tell.

Even La Travadeuse shuddered to listen, while the detective knitted his brows until those falcon eyes of his became but mere glistening specks in the moonlight.

"Why, this man is a real monster!" exclaimed Therese. "Even in Paris, the home of exquisite ferocity, no less than of exquisite everything else, we do not have such finesse of butchering. Ciel! it sounds too horrible—even for the diablerie of a Gaborian or the invention of a Du Boisgebey."

"We must not linger here, however," interposed Old Falcon, sternly. "Come. The fiend will doubtless be back here in a few moments, with Henrette in his company. Our equipage is already disposed of over yonder in the shadows. We shall hardly have time to thoroughly place ourselves on watch and in concealment."

In the meantime, Joseph Mervyn, having returned from the scene of the tragedy to the dog-cart, in which he had driven down from Tarrytown late in the afternoon, made all speed over the silent road in the direction of Retta's domicile.

He had completely recovered his iron nerve, if indeed he had ever parted with any of it, and even experienced a feeling of security, if not of positive exhilaration, as he tightened the lines of the fine and powerful horse he drove, and fairly burned up the road, as the Frenchmen would say.

"What a splendid animal!" he said to himself, "and how I wish that this whole rig were mine! The compartment under the seat on which I am sitting would comfortably stow away the entire treasure, boxes and contents, and then, with the darling Henriette, trusting and resigned at my side here on the springy seat, we could make our first dash off into the unknown, with nothing but love and pleasure before us, and the secrets of the red past comfortably behind.

"Why may it not turn out so, any way? She can scarcely fail to be grateful for my gallantry and address, when the fortune is once placed fairly at her seeming disposal by my hands; from her evident insensibility of to-day, I cannot think that she will be so horribly shocked, after all, when we shall come upon the dead bodies of Mayfield and his companions in the cistern; the only others who were aware of the treasure—those escaped convicts that I did for so summarily—are silenced forever; and I might easily send the liveryman a round price for this rig from some quiet, hill-folded nook in the interior of the country. Who knows? who knows?"

And, having met and passed the buggy containing Therese and Old Falcon without suspecting anything wrong, he actually began to whistle in his delusive self-confidence.

It was not quite ten o'clock when he drew up before Mrs. Kelly's cottage gate, where, to his undisguised satisfaction, he found Henriette awaiting his appearance.

It had cost the young woman all the resolution and force of character of which she was capable to keep this appointment, in view of what she knew of Joseph's absolutely desperate and unscrupulous character, but, having once fairly screwed up her courage to the sticking point, there was no such thing as a back-down with her.

"We are again fortunate," she said, lightly climbing up to the seat at his side, after an indifferent response to his greeting words. "Mrs. Kelly is again absent, probably for the entire night, at the bedside of her invalid friend, so that I shall not be missed from the cottage."

"Nothing could be better," replied Joseph, seeing that she was comfortably settled, and once more putting the horse to his paces. "Nothing could have turned out more fortunately."

But now for the first time, as they entered an uninterrupted strip of moonlight, she perceived the uncouth change in his attire.

"Why, what have you been doing with yourself?" she exclaimed. "Had I noticed this before, I might have hesitated to trust you tonight."

"What's the matter, Cousin Retta?" he asked, with a grin.

"You look like a tramp!"

"Ha! Nothing like disguising oneself for a night adventure, cousin?"

"But is there occasion for disguise, think you?"

"Perhaps not; but it is always well to be on the safe side, you know."

"But I should have thought a young gentleman of your tastes would have chosen something more seemly than this threadbare, tatterdemalion costume."

"Nothing else was handy at Tarrytown. I had to take what I could get at a sort of riverman's slop-shop that I was lucky enough to discover near the boat-landing. This will answer, and has already served me one good turn that I must tell you of."

But here, with a slight exclamation, she started skrinkingly away from him.

"What now?" he demanded.

She pointed tremblingly at the breast and shoulder of the old coat he was wearing.

"There are slits like knife-cuts in it," she exclaimed, with a shudder. "And look! are those not stains of blood? Yes; and not very old ones either, I should say. Oh!"

But Joseph was quite equal to even this occasion, much as he had been taken by surprise for the instant.

"The deuce!" he ejaculated, examining the coat with an air of astonishment. "The scoundrel who sold me the duds said nothing about these imperfections, and I certainly did not examine my bargain very closely. However," with a gay laugh, "I doubt if he would consent to receive back the suit as a misfit."

"But the blood-stains?"

"I really can't account for them," coolly, "unless, indeed, a bad boil that I have on my shoulder may have broken unawares. That is doubtless the explanation, for I begin to notice a sort of uncomfortable stiffness all down my body on that side. Don't give it another thought, I beg of you—scarcely an agreeable subject, at best!"

She regained her composure.

"You were about to tell me of your odd disguise having already served you a good turn."

"Yes, yes! Well, I have already paid a visit to the old house this evening."

"What, without me? But I thought it strange that you should be driving from that direction."

"You won't criticise me too harshly, I opine, when you learn my motive for making the preliminary visit. Do you ever have premonitions?"

"Yes."

"Uncontrollable ones, that fairly force you into action, as if at the behest of a blind, yet overpowering, prompting?"

"I cannot certainly say as to that. Were you thus prompted to visit the cottage by stealth and without me?"

"Most truly; and thereby hangs the adventure of which I would tell you and advise you to be prepared for, as it embraces a tragedy."

"A tragedy!"

For a moment her heart stood still. Had there been an error in the calculations of Old Falcon, as to the time that Therese and he were to meet Mayfield at the old house, and had perchance the entire trio fallen victims to this murderous villain's revengeful rage at finding the deception that was being attempted upon him?

But she was speedily reassured.

"Yes, a tragedy," repeated her companion, "but one of which I was only a witness—a fatal secret witness, you might say—and whose strange outcome can hardly be considered otherwise than decidedly fortunate for us."

"Listen. This spanking team brought me from Tarrytown to Yonkers at a much earlier hour of the evening than I had any use for."

"Suddenly I was aware of a mysterious and overpowering impression that the treasure was in danger, and that I must rush without delay to its rescue."

"I have had such impressions before, though never quite so imperative as in this case, and I have never found them to belie their warnings, or had occasion to regret my yielding to their mysterious commands."

"I set out at once for the old house, reaching it in the middle of the dusk, and then in obedience to the same prompting, concealed the turnout here in a little wood just back of where the orchard fence begins."

CHAPTER XLI.

IN HIS OWN TOILS.

RETTA interrupted her companion by looking up at him in surprise.

"You hid away this turnout in that little wood back of the orchard?" she queried.

"Yes."

"Why did you do that?"

"I cannot tell, save that it was in obedience to the general premonition of danger under which I was laboring."

"Something told me that there was reason for secrecy and caution, no less than for prompt action and expedition."

"After hiding away the rig, I returned to the road, passed silently along to the gate, and thence to the house."

"Entering the kitchen, without interruption, I at once became aware of there being intruders in the vicinity of the buried treasure."

"Low voices came from the direction of the cellars, and, peering noiselessly down the steps, I could see the reflection of a light."

"My only weapon chanced to be a knife. This I took in my hand ready for use, and began to creep stealthily down the steps."

Naturally enough, Retta had become intensely interested.

"What did you imagine?" she asked.

"The truth—what turned out to be the truth! It came upon me like a revelation."

"Even before seeing the owners of those voices, I instinctively felt them to be escaped convicts, those that remained of the original purloiners of your father's funds, now returned, after breaking jail, for the purpose of appropriating and dividing the property."

"What! you really divined all that, and yet you advanced singly to the treasure's defense?"

"Certainly."

Impulsive admiration for physical heroism in man was one of Henriette Mervyn's weaknesses, if it may fitly be classified with such.

"Cousin Joseph, you are a brave man!" she said, with much simplicity.

"Thank you, Cousin Retta; but I only thought I was doing my duty by you."

"Go on, please."

"Well, it was not destined that I should defend the treasure, after all."

"I was not half-way down the cellar steps before the low voices suddenly rose to an angry pitch, and it was evident that the criminals were in a violent dispute over the division of the buried spoil—even before they had succeeded in wholly unearthing it, as the event afterward proved."

"I came to a pause at the bottom of the steps, and listened. The disputing voices continued to wax more violent, intermixed with oaths and epithets, and then it became evident that the owners had joined issue in deadly combat."

"So engrossed were the scoundrels in their struggle, that I was enabled to look in upon them without being discovered."

"The scene in the north cellar that presented itself was a memorably tragic one."

"By the light of a couple of lanterns hanging from the walls, and at the edge of the half-scooped-out excavation directly over the cistern cover, two rough, villainous-looking ruffians were bloodily contending for the mastery."

"It was an unequal contest, however, for only one of them was armed, he being provided with a long knife, which he had already used with terrible effect upon his burlier and more muscular antagonist, who was bleeding from several stabs, though still endeavoring to choke the other and tear the cruel blade from his grasp."

"Peacemaking is an unmanly weakness of mine, Cousin Retta. I was just on the point of springing in between the combatants, and separating them, no matter at what risk to myself, when the sudden and partly unexpected termination of the tragedy rendered interposition out of the question."

"The unarmed ruffian suddenly tumbled back into the trench, stone dead at last from a *coup de grace* in the region of the heart."

"Almost at the same instant the victor, until then uninjured it would seem, caught his foot upon a fragment of earth, and, stumbling violently forward on his face at the edge of the shallow pit, lay there quite motionless, after a gasping sigh and a convulsive tremor or two. Upon examination, he also proved to be dead."

"Dead, too?"

"Yes; he had fallen upon the point of his own knife, after using it so murderously upon his companion in crime, and it had entered his heart."

"Horrible!" was all Retta could say.

"You may well say that, cousin mine. But wasn't I right in preparing you for the tragic scene that must be awaiting us in the cellar?"

"Yes, yes; that is—But you—you left the bodies lying just there?"

"Certainly. There was no other course left me, you see, as I had to hurry back to keep my appointment with you. However, I must say I would hardly have known what to do in the matter, even with more time at my disposal."

"What shall you do?"

"I am still at a loss to know. What might occur to you?"

"Nothing, nothing!" with a shudder. "Heavens! it is too horrible."

"Well, it will be easy enough to drag the bodies to one side, the hole down to the cistern-plate being already more than half re-dug for us. Then, after securing the treasure, why shouldn't the same excavation answer for a double grave in which to bury away the dead scoundrels, there to slumber and rot forevermore?"

"Ah!"

"This plan, by the way, strikes me as an excellent one; what do you think of it?"

"Oh, anything, anything will do, I suppose! Let us not think of it now; let us wait till the terrible reality confronts us."

"As you will, cousin."

"Was this—this unexpected tragedy the good turn you mentioned as to your disguise having already served you?"

"Yes."

"But I do not see how the shabbiness of your present dress could have had anything to do with it, one way or the other."

"Ah, well, neither do I just now exactly," and he scratched his head with his whip-hand, after touching up the horse. "But the villains might have caught a glimpse of me, you know, before engaging in their grapple, which might then have been postponed, or resulted differently. See?"

"Not very clearly, since they could not have known you for what you are any more in one dress than in another. But it is of no consequence."

"No, of course not. I see now that it could have made no difference either way. Funny it hadn't occurred to me before. But here we are. Suppose you descend here, cousin, and wait in the road for me, while I hitch up in among the woods there, secure from chance observation. I will rejoin you in a moment."

She silently obeyed, and, having already divined that his previous visit to the vicinity of the treasure had doubtless been solely prompted by a dishonest motive, came to the conclusion that there was something behind the dreadful story, probably still less to his credit, that he had refrained from telling her.

He quickly returned to her, carrying two enormous portmanteaus, one in each hand.

"I think these will answer our purpose," he explained, with his grinning smile. "When filled with the money, they will slide conveniently into the body of the dog-cart, and then—click! click!—we are up and away, with nobody the wiser."

"Let us not forget one important feature of our enterprise," said Retta, as they proceeded side by side along the orchard wall to the cottage gate.

"What is that, cousin?"

"I refer to our three prisoners in the cistern—Mayfield, Old Falcon and the unknown lad."

"Oh, to be sure!"

"You know you as good as promised me that we should find them alive, but little the worse for their long entombment?"

"Oh, come, Cousin Retta; not quite a promise."

"You insisted that there would be ample air and ventilation to support life—that all cisterns were necessarily constructed in that way—you know you did."

"I think I said they ought to be constructed in that way."

"Oh!"

"This one, you know, might have been constructed on false, or perhaps on altogether different, mechanical principles."

"Are you preparing for the possibility of our finding Mayfield and his companions dead in the cistern?"

"Oh, bless you! not exactly that. But then there is no blinking the bare possibility of such a thing; and it is a good thing to be prepared for the unexpected at all times, cousin."

She pretended to catch her breath, but maintained such a general composure as could not fail to augment his self-satisfaction greatly.

"I am glad to see you exhibit such fortitude, cousin," said he, seriously. "Now if, by any possibility, these three scoundrels should be found dead in that cistern vault, do not let us forget that they met their death while in the commission of a dastardly felony—in the mean, criminal attempt to rob you of the fortune whose original spoliation was the cause of your poor father's ruin and untimely death."

"I shall do my best to bear up."

"That is right, that is the proper, the true Roman spirit!" he went on. "Oh, how I hate dishonesty! If I had my way, I think I would have robbery punishable as a capital crime, no less than murder in the first degree!"

She made no answer to this burst of virtuous indignation, for they had now entered the house-grounds, and, as they drew along the path near the kitchen-door, she caught the encouraging gleam of a pair of eyes in among some shrubbery to the left, which she knew could belong to no one but Old Falcon himself.

Entering the kitchen, where the lantern was still burning, apparently just as he had left it, Joseph, whose hands were full, requested Retta to take the light and follow him, and then he proceeded without a quiver down the cellar-stairs.

"Prepare yourself now!" he cautioned, with a steady voice, as he led the way directly toward the light flowing out of the north, or front, cellar. "It is a pretty ghastly sight."

Retta had already caught a glimpse of Mayfield and Therese crouching away to one side in the remotest corner of the middle compartment; but, even with this encouragement, she with the utmost difficulty supported the sickening scene disclosed as she followed Joseph—partly into the theater of the recent tragedy.

Everything was just as he had left it, even to the smallest details of the sickening and appalling spectacle.

There lay the one convict in the bottom of the trench, ghastly, gashed and bloody; while the motionless figure of the other was still lying, face down, at its trampled edge, with the reeking knife having the appearance of being yet clutched in one hand.

Retta leaned against the door frame, pallid and breathing hard.

"Now just bear up a minute, and after that you mayn't mind it a bit," advised Joseph, in a business-like, all but cheerful tone. "We'll soon make an end of the matter, and then all will be serene."

He had set down the portmanteaus, and was coolly luggering the corpses to one side with a methodical, matter-of-fact air that could not but add to her horror of him, no less than of the dumb tragedy itself.

"There you are! See!" and stripping off his miserable coat, as a preliminary to grasping and going to work with the spade into the blood-stained trench, he carefully spread it over the dead men's faces, so as to screen them from her view. "How is that? Don't be afraid to come right in here now, while I am at work." Here he spat on his hands, and set to digging industriously. "Besides telling no tales, there's worse company than dead men in this world, Cousin Retta. They're orderly and composed, if not exactly prepossessing, and they have a way of strictly minding their own business, which ought positively to endear them to a fellow.—Hah at last."

The words had been spoken in jerks, while the spadefuls were being made to fly out of the hole, and now he tilted up the iron lid, and, after lowering a lantern and the two portmanteaus into the cistern, peered down after them.

"Why, the place is empty, save for the cash!" he almost shouted, looking up with an air of blank disappointment and suspicion. "There's not a man-jack of 'em down there, living or dead!"

"Are you sure? Look again!"

As he did so, Retta sprung forward, buried him headlong into the pit, with a wild, exulting cry, and pushing back the lid over the hole, fairly danced upon it.

CHAPTER XLI.

THE END OF HIS ROPE NOT YET.

"VILLAIN! scoundrel! devil in human shape!" screamed the young girl, as she effected this turning of the tables upon her late companion. "You were so disappointed at not finding your three victims dead down there, now take a sample of their despairing sensations to your own black heart!"

Here Mayfield, Therese, and the detective came rushing in upon the scene, and, as she clambered out of the excavation, while the first-named excitedly began to throw a few spadefuls of earth back on top of the lid, as though to make sure of the diabolical captive, she threw herself into La Travadeuse's arms, and burst into a flood of half-hysterical tears.

"Oh, what I have suffered in that fiend's company!" she sobbed. "It was like being in a tiger's cage, or being compelled to consort with a serpent."

"You may well say that, *pauvre petite*, and yet you cannot know the worst of him," murmured Therese, moved by the young girl's agonized reaction more than she would have liked to confess. "These wretched corpses here—they are his work! *Mon Dieu!* the man would make a furor in Paris—his diabolism is unique."

"What! you mean to tell me that he murdered those wretched convicts?"

"With his own hand, though singly and apart, my dear. *Cher Harvee* was an eye-witness."

Old Falcon had laid his hand on Mayfield's arm, and now raised his hand authoritatively.

"Listen!" said he, inclining his ear toward the cistern-lid.

They all did so, listening intently, but not a sound came from below—not even a rap for mercy underneath the iron plate, such as might have been expected.

Therese was the first one quick-witted enough to suggest a meaning for the unlooked-for silence.

"*Sang du Seigneur!* the tunnel—the secret passage!" she screamed. "It served our turn, why not *his*?"

Without a word Mayfield drew his revolver, and darted away like a shot.

"Good!" commented the detective, recovering quickly from his momentary chagrin. "Not five minutes have been wasted, and the underground passage is fortunately both tortuous and difficult, even if our captive should have become aware of its existence at the outset."

"And, as he must have fallen on his head when I pushed him so vigorously," said Retta, "he is more likely to be lying stunned below there than anything else."

"Still, villains like Professor Josephs are like cats—they always fall on their feet," suggested Therese. "Hadn't we better follow *cher Harvee* to the orchard mouth of the tunnel?"

But so rapid and energetic had been the young man's action upon the alarming hint that had been given that, even as she finished speaking, they heard the noise of his re-entrance into the kitchen.

Mayfield put in a reappearance out of breath, but with a satisfied look on his face that was sufficiently reassuring.

"The outlet of the passage is hopelessly blocked against any egress," he managed to say, between his pantings. "I used the crowbar in tumbling down a mass of earth and stones into the entrance, through which even a rat could not burrow his way in six hours."

"There were no signs then," demanded the detective, "of the man making or having made use of the tunnel?"

"None whatever."

"Good!" and the detective sprung down into the hole, and seized the cistern-lid. "But let us make sure of our game by taking a peep into his cage."

He lifted the plate to one side, disclosing that the lantern was still burning brightly below.

Then he threw himself on his knees, and cautiously peered down into the cistern.

Instantly, however, he looked up in blank and startled amazement.

"Gone! Vanished!—man, treasure, everything!"

The words burst from his lips in a sort of concentrated fury.

The next instant he had drawn his revolver, dropped into the cistern, and they could hear him plunging into the entrance of the secret passage, lantern in hand.

Mayfield and the young woman could only exchange glances expressive of the bitter disappointment just communicated to them.

"Wait!" exclaimed the former, in a scarcely audible voice. "It is next to impossible that the scoundrel could have slipped through the half-choked passage, burdened with those immense portmanteaus, before I blocked up the orchard exit. The detective must find him crouching somewhere in the passage!"

Next to impossible, perhaps, but none the less true!

A moment later Old Falcon reappeared, clambering into view, breathless, stern, covered with the earth-stains of the tunnel.

"He's off with the cash, every dollar of it—nothing left but the empty boxes!" he cried, in

his sharp, intense way. "Quick! to the road. With the brief start he has had, we may yet head him off!"

And away he dashed, followed by the others, out of the cellar, and out of the house.

Too late!

As they reached the gate, Joseph was just bowling past in the dog-cart, his superb horse heading to the southward at a spanking pace.

"Baffled! tricked!" were the exultant words from his sneering lips, as he flashed past, and was gone.

Mayfield fairly stamped upon the ground in his rage and disappointment.

Retta, the last vestige of her unnaturally sustained nerve leaving her at last, burst into tears, and clung once more to Therese, who was standing like a beautiful statue, unable to know exactly whether to rejoice or grieve over the loss of her rival's fortune.

The Thunderbolt Detective had alone maintained his energetic composure, as it might be called.

"Not a moment is to be lost!" he exclaimed. "Mr. Mayfield, escort the ladies back to Yonkers, while I make the best use of our equipage. The police telegraph must be put in requisition at the earliest moment. The scoundrel may save his own skin, but he shall not get off with the money. Trust me for that!"

A moment later, and he was in the buggy, with the horse headed up the road, while the trio still lingered at the gate.

"What!" cried Mayfield: "you will drive in the opposite direction from that taken by the fugitive?"

"Yes; the fellow is tricky enough to double in his tracks," was the reply. "Meet me at the Yonkers Police Station."

Then his whip fell upon the animal's flank, and he was off like the wind.

There was but little conversation between Mayfield and his companions during the walk back to Yonkers, but, when scarcely more than half-way thither, they met several constables, on their way in a light wagon to take charge of the haunted house, together with the dead bodies in its cellar, which was sufficient proof as to the expedition that the detective was putting into his movements.

Arriving at Mrs. Kelly's gate, Mayfield suggested that Therese would do well to remain there with Henriette over night, while he should be away with the detective.

But, much to his surprise, both ladies objected to such an arrangement, and insisted on still accompanying him.

"*Cher ami!*" said Therese, calmly; "I have not cheated my beloved New York public of my idolized performance for two nights in succession, in order to back out of a fox-hunt when the hounds are in full cry. Make yourself easy, my dear. That isn't the style of Therese Bertrande, *nee* Peggy Burkitt, and surnamed The Whirlwind of the tented arena."

"I shall go too," quietly remarked Henriette, who had now thoroughly recovered her nerve, and was quite composed. "Now that my fortune is taking to itself wings," with a smile, "I somehow feel more interested in its recovery than ever before. If you will wait till I can inform good Mrs. Kelly of my safety—for I see by the light in her room that she has returned—I will rejoin you in a moment."

Therese nodded an assent, and the young girl disappeared into the cottage while they remained in the moonlight at the gate.

"A lovely child that, *cher ami!*" gravely commented La Travadeuse.

Mayfield's sole answer was a look, half-distrust, half-defiance.

He had come to think more highly of Therese latterly than theretofore, but was still half-fearful of the eccentric woman and her bold independent ways.

"What a pity, *cheri*, that I have really come to love you—not only after my wild, capricious fashion, understand, but in the regular, time-old womanly and self-sacrificing way!" she went on quietly, and with a new glistening in her splendid black eyes. "What a pity, I say; for I can't understand it myself. You're not much of a man, my dear—that is, apart from your beauty. You're both weak and irresolute—just what a good man, a man that a woman ought to love, ought not to be. And yet—But you can't help it, *pauvre petit!* The fact merely remains that, having come to love you, I must have you to myself, or—well, I suppose I must die!"

The young man made his favorite gesture, so rapid and abrupt, and yet not without a certain sentiment and sympathy in it.

"Do not talk in that vein, Therese, I beg of you," he said. "I believe you are a noble woman, though such a strange one. But you must see that I can never love you—that my heart is not mine to give."

"*Peste!* as if I didn't know that it is in that young girl's keeping beyond redemption. However, don't imagine that I am going to give you up to her—unless something should occur to put the matter beyond a doubt. When I love truly, it is to the death, *petit!*"

At this juncture Henriette's return put an end to the conversation.

They set out for the police-station, it now being near midnight.

"Go on before, *cher Harvee*," commanded Therese, presently. "The streets are so well lighted that we can follow on alone."

Mayfield obeyed, for by this time they were within a short distance of the station.

"You love that youth, *petite!*" were La Travadeuse's first words, peremptorily spoken, as soon as she was alone with Retta.

The latter turned upon her with a half-angry blush.

"Madame Bertrande—"

"Yes, yes, yes!" interrupted the other, impatiently. "But, don't waste time by trying to be indignant or reserved with me, *belle petite*. He loves you and you love him, in spite of what has happened. Is it not the truth?"

"I decline to discuss the subject, madame."

"You shall discuss it! I say you love Harvey Mayfield, you return his love, in spite of the poor, miserable, paltry, weak, dishonest and contemptible figure he has cut in all this business?"

Retta flushed again, and her eyes sparkled resentfully.

"I will not hear Mr. Mayfield abused or underrated," she exclaimed.

Therese burst into a laugh.

"Ha! it is because you love him!"

"What of that?"

"*Eh bien!* well, I merely wanted you to admit it, that was all. You are possibly aware that I love him, too."

"I am aware that you say you do."

Therese turned upon her in real anger.

"You are like the rest of the fools!" she exclaimed. "You would deem me incapable of loving a man truly and deeply, just because I am different from the rest of you. You are fools, fools, fools, all of you! What will nothing but some great, some tragic revelation open your eyes at last?"

Retta was half-frightened.

"I cannot understand what you mean," she faltered.

Therese laughed her strange laugh again and then, throwing her arms around the young girl, kissed her.

"You may understand me better some day," she said, with her best charm of manner. "But come, my dear. Yonder must be the police-station, where that knot of earnest men are gathered, and, if I mistake not, here is our dear Mr. Mayfield looking for us."

CHAPTER XLIII.

ON THE WINGED FORTUNE'S TRACK.

"OLD FALCON will join us in a few minutes," announced Mayfield, on coming back to the ladies. "Let us await him here."

"But, what has Monsieur Vieux Faucon been doing?" demanded Therese.

"Chasing the fugitive with the telegraph," was the reply.

"Then the entire history of the affair has been made public?" exclaimed Retta, in a tone of the deepest regret.

"Yes, Miss Mervyn, but I am quite sure Major Falconbridge can have brought in the mention of your family connection with the affair only where it is necessary."

"Ah, but, unfortunately it is altogether my family affair."

"That is true."

"And I was even born in the old house that has been the dreadful scene of nearly all of it. Everything will be revived now, and my Merrivale obscurity is at an end!"

This was said with the genuine regret of a sensitive nature unwillingly brought into pronounced publicity.

Mayfield had opened his eyes widely at the first sentence, which so fully simplified the painful circumstances of his first meeting with the young girl; but the appearance of Old Falcon at this juncture, walking rapidly toward them from the group at the station door, put an end to the discussion.

"There is some encouragement, which is better than none," said he, softly rubbing his hands together.

"Monsieur Vieux Faucon," cried Therese, "you will at once enlighten our curiosity or have our innocent deaths upon your conscience."

"What little there is to say, madame," continued the detective, "can best be told in a pretty refreshment saloon that I notice to be still open over the way."

After the party had installed themselves in a private supper-room in the restaurant alluded to, with some good things before them, Old Falcon went on:

"The case stands just thus: I have worked the telegraph for all it is worth. The fugitive, for a certainty, cannot seek a hiding-place, either by car or by his treasure-laden dog-cart, any place within the New York City confines, without being nabbed.

"Better than that, there is a positive clew to his identity having been already tracked.

"His turn-out has been found abandoned at the roadside near a Northern Railroad station, only eight miles south of here."

"Better still, it was in the vicinity of Tubby

Hock, where I happen to know he has some intimate friends residing, who would be apt to inconvenience themselves toward helping him out of a scrape."

"Even better than that, it is almost certain that he must have taken a train at or near that point, though doubtless in some additional disguise."

"An up or down train?" asked Mayfield.

"Unfortunately, either the one or the other, since he might have availed himself of either."

"What had we better do next?"

"Go home and wait."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Certainly. There will be a train for Tarrytown in twenty minutes. In the mean time, you had better see Miss Mervyn to her domicile without delay. She can rejoin us at Mrs. Godlove's to-morrow. Indeed, I should advise this, since she is more nearly concerned in the recovery of the property than any one else."

Henriette arose to go.

"What!" exclaimed Mayfield to the detective; "and you will return to Mrs. Godlove's?"

"Undoubtedly. Don't ask any questions now. I simply have a theory that we are not yet done with Tarrytown as the scene of our sensational drama."

After Mayfield had returned from escorting Henriette to her home (during which scarcely a dozen words, and those but commonplaces, had passed between them), the three made one more visit to the police-station, without securing any further information of the fugitive, and then availed themselves of an up-train for Tarrytown.

It was after one o'clock when they reached Mrs. Godlove's, but the house betrayed signs of animation that were most unusual at such an hour.

Several huge trunks were piled up in the lighted hall, and sleepy servants were moving hither and thither.

An unexpected new arrival, a very wealthy invalid Mrs. Smith, bearing the best of references to the *maison* Godlove, and newly disembarked from a European steamer, had put in an appearance but a few minutes previously. The best third-story accommodations had been placed at her disposal. One of her trunks and several portmanteaus had already followed the guest to her rooms. Her French maid would follow later on. But she was now worn out, had just been made easy, and had left strict orders that she was not to be disturbed.

Such was the information gathered by Therese, Mayfield and the detective, after which they lost no time in separating for the night.

The following day was a Sunday.

Soon after breakfast Major Falconbridge made his acknowledgments to Mrs. Godlove, in the presence of Therese and Mayfield, and was in readiness to return to New York.

"How is the new guest, ma'am?" he asked of the landlady.

"But poorly, it seems," was the reply. "She has signified that she will take her meals in her rooms, until further orders, and scarcely any of us have caught more than a mere glimpse of her. Only that Mrs. Smith is very wealthy, and came to me with the most aristocratic recommendations, I would have hesitated to furnish accommodations on such short notice."

The detective seemed to take but little interest, but managed, after a significant good-by to Mayfield, to say a few words at parting with La Travadeuse.

"I shall not quit this village at all," said he, quietly, "though it is necessary that I should seem to do so."

"You surprise me, monsieur."

"Naturally. But what I wish now is for you to ask no questions, and to promise strict obedience to certain directions I am about to give you."

"What are monsieur's directions?"

"That you keep a constant and suspicious watch for information of the new arrival, the somewhat mysterious Mrs. Smith; that you also maintain your purely sisterly lookout for young Mr. Mayfield's security; and that, upon Miss Mervyn's visit here to-day, you manage to keep her in the house over night."

Therese had opened her eyes, but almost instantly took on a look of superior intelligence, and abstained from comment.

"Eh bien, your directions shall be followed to the letter, monsieur," was all she said. "Anything else?"

"Yes." He gave her a small silver whistle. "Should anything particularly startling occur—it will most likely be at night, if at all—notify me by sounding this signal. Am I understood?"

"Yes, monsieur," she replied, "so far as your directions extend."

"That is sufficient, then." And, with a parting pressure of the hand, he took his departure hustlingly, as though in haste to catch a train.

There was almost nothing of importance at the boarding-house during the day, and Henriette, who had arrived in the afternoon, was easily persuaded by Therese to accept of Mrs. Godlove's accommodations for the night, when informed that Old Falcon had expressed such as his desire.

The arrival of the New York newspapers had

contained a brief mention of the tragic sensation in the vicinity of Yonkers, but without enough details to cause any special curiosity on the part of Mrs. Godlove and the rest, and the three members of the household who were in the secret were careful to keep their own counsel.

Night came finding Therese in a very unsatisfactory condition of mind, for the exercise of her most cunning and persistent diplomacy throughout the day had resulted in her discovering just nothing at all of the mysterious invalid guest, whose set of rooms was directly above the two occupied severally by Mayfield and herself.

"Wait till the promised French maid puts in an appearance," she kept saying to herself. "Then, let *Madame L'Enigme* keep herself hermetically sealed up in her seclusion as she may, I should be a poor Parisian not to be able to pump the maid for what there may be to learn."

But no maid put in an appearance, and at last bedtime came around with the new arrival as much of a mystery as at the outset.

Mayfield had retired early, apparently sick at heart by reason of what he construed as Henriette's continued coldness toward him.

Therese was on her way up-stairs when La Sauterelle came running out of a small room at the first landing in her night-dress.

"Maman, may I not pass the night with dear Mlle. Merrivale?" she cried, in her pretty mixture of French and English. "She has fallen quite in love with me, and will whisper me to sleep with pretty stories."

Therese was about to return a decided negative to this request (notwithstanding that Retta had further propitiated her, although altogether unintentionally, by making a great deal of Mignon throughout her visit), when the room door opened again, and Miss Mervyn herself looked out.

"Do let her sleep with me, Mrs. Bertrande!" said Retta, pleadingly. "We have taken such a liking to each other, Mignon and I."

Therese entered the room, leading the child by the hand, and closed the door.

"Oh, I have no objection, mademoiselle," she replied. "But, you mustn't blame me if you regret the arrangement. The little imp is apt to be highly gymnastic in her sleep."

"I will take my chances, and thank you all the same," murmured the young girl, drawing the child gently to her, while Therese withdrew.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THERÈSE'S HEROISM.

RETURNING to her own room, which she had quitted to go down-stairs but a short time before, La Travadeuse kept herself awake by reading a novel until late in the night.

Then, rising, and even drawing off her slippers to insure greater caution, she softly quitted her room and stole up-stairs.

There were two large, communicating rooms, front, on the next floor above, and these, chancing to be disengaged at the time of the new arrival—the mysterious invalid widow from abroad, with such irreproachable written recommendations, and yet whose mere personal appearance was as yet scarcely a known quantity in the gossip of the boarding-house—had given up to her exclusive accommodation.

The rear rooms of the same floor were occupied by other boarders, with the exception of one at the back end of the passage, which had been temporarily assigned to Old Falcon, and was now occupied by the fair landlady herself.

A dim light was burning in the passage, and there was not a sign of wakefulness from either one of the adjoining rooms.

Nevertheless, Therese paused at the single door communicating with the mysterious invalid's apartments, from which a dim light issued through the open transom, and listened long and intently.

Not a sound, even of somnolent breathing from within.

Presently, reaching up and clutching the edge of the transom frame, whose sash was tilted open, Therese, with the ease of her athletic training, drew her chin to its level, with a noiselessly sustained effort of her muscular arms, and peered within.

By the dim, lowered light, La Travadeuse could just make out the outlines of an occupant of the bed, nearly shut away from view by the festooning curtain loops.

But, that was all, though it struck her, ere fatigue compelled a relinquishment of her suspended attitude, that the outlines thus revealed under the drapery of the couch were those of a singularly large and robust form scarcely to be anticipated in an invalid widow from abroad, except in the case of an exceptionally tall and powerfully framed woman.

However, this deduction did not amount to much, and, after listening for some time longer with her ear at the keyhole, without being rewarded by the hint of a movement from within, she slipped back, disappointed, to her own room.

"However, I must not give up," she thought to herself. "The eagle-eyed detective would not have enforced this odd mission upon me without some profound suspicion as to the identity of that invisible widow up yonder, and I

must not prove myself unworthy of his confidence. I shall lie here on my own bed, with my door ajar, and listen like a cat in the darkness till morning breaks, if needs be; but if anything is worth the finding out, I shall discover it, or gnaw my own heart out with trying."

She therefore adopted this suggestion, but soon found, with the absence of her novel and the light, that there was great danger of her dropping off to sleep in her unrelieved vigils.

She accordingly aroused herself, lighted the lamp again, consoled herself with half-a-bottle of champagne from her private refrigerator, and, once more extinguishing the light, once more extended herself upon the couch at the half-ajar door, greatly refreshed and more determined to listen and watch out the night than before.

But alas! the seductive stimulant, to which she was thoroughly accustomed, instead of reinforcing her praiseworthy resolve, as it might have done under less exhausting conditions, only served in the present instance to increase her sense of comfort and ease, and in less than ten minutes after the indulgence she was fast asleep.

But the adventuress was a light sleeper, at the most.

Fortunately, her varied and enterprising career had included experiences among the lion-hunters of Abyssinia and Algiers, the wild Turcomans of the Asian steppes, and the jungle-girt cities of the Indian peninsula, where so often the stake of one's life trembles in the balance of the capacity to spring, ready-armed and with the faculties on the alert, out of slumber to confront unexpected perils.

Apparently in the deepest hush of night, Therese suddenly awoke now, under analogous circumstances.

The room was pitch-dark, the light in the adjoining passage having been extinguished or gone out of its own accord.

She silently arose in the darkness to a sitting posture on the side of the bed, thoroughly cognizant of her situation, and yet uncertain as to what had exactly awoken her.

Was it a stealthy step in the room above (the "widow's" room), on the stair, or in the passage just outside her door, and creeping toward the adjoining one—that of Mayfield's room? for that it was a step, and nothing else but a step, she felt assured, the uncertainty applying solely to its locality.

She rather inclined to the last suggestion, that the step had passed on to Mayfield's room, and she even seemed to vaguely associate with it another dreamily-caught sound, like the opening and closing of a door.

After a moment's accustoming herself to the darkness, so that it was not so absolute as before, she arose, and noiselessly made her way into the passage.

There was no fanlight to the door of Mayfield's apartment, which was tightly closed, but she judged from a faint reflection perceptible between its lower edge and the sill that the interior was most probably more or less illuminated by the moonlight.

She applied her eye to the keyhole, but without result.

Then she placed her light touch upon the door-knob, but hesitated to turn it, while she felt that a deep flush was suffusing her face.

That blush in the dark was creditable to La Travadeuse, *nee* Peggy Burkitt, the world-waif of the London slums.

"I cannot do it!" she thought, drawing back, with that creditable blush burning on her cheeks in the dark. "*Mon jeune ange adoré!* whether he ever return my love or not, never again shall I risk losing his respect."

She listened intently at the door, but not a sound came from the interior of the room.

Then she stole up the stairs to the passage above, in which a light had still been left dimly burning.

Arriving once more at the door of the new arrival's rooms, to her surprise, she found it partly ajar!

No sound coming from within, she pushed it softly open.

The couch was freshly deserted. She ascertained this by laying her hand on the depression made by its recent occupant, and discovering that it was still warm.

A hurried examination in the semi-darkness convinced her that the room and the one with which it communicated were alike deserted.

Then she turned up the light.

For an instant the revelation thus made by an exhibition of the mysterious inmate's personal belongings was such as to almost paralyze her.

She had anticipated something extraordinary, to be sure, but this which was really revealed to her—well, it fairly took her breath away and held her riveted to the spot for an instant!

Then she was gliding back and away, retracing her steps, with clinched hands, knitted brows, and the whole force of her fearless, resolute spirit alight in the strong, energetic glow of her dark, comely face.

As she was slipping by Mrs. Godlove's door, it suddenly opened, and the landlady herself, as though newly roused from sleep by some suspi-

cious intimation that all was not well, confronted her.

Mrs. Godlove looked terribly startled, and her lips were already opened to emit a sharp cry or exclamation, when La Travadeuse clapped her hand over them just in time to enforce their silence.

The next instant the mistress of the house was helpless and speechless in the iron grip of *l'aventuriere du cirque*.

"Silence, on your life!" hissed the latter, in a barely audible whisper through her clinched teeth. "Listen! Your mysterious new arrival of last night—your invalid rich widow from abroad—is a monster in disguise, and Mr. Mayfield's life is in danger! I have just made this appalling discovery, and am now on my way to save him. Do you understand?"

Mrs. Godlove managed to make a movement of assent.

"And you will not spoil all by crying out or uttering an exclamation?"

A negative sign.

"You are sure, *cher* Godlove, you are *sure*? Remember, it would not be safe to trifle with me now!" And there was a perceptible tightening of the iron grip.

Yes, yes; *cher* Godlove was quite sure. If the truth must be told, in addition to having the breath nearly squeezed out of her body by that boa-constrictor grasp, she was nearly frightened out of her wits.

As Therese suddenly released her, to glide away upon her errand, the handsome boarding-house mistress sunk into a confused heap of night-dress and curl-papers on the landing.

Then a wild and spasmodic resolve convulsed her frame with what would pass muster for new courage.

Should this detestably beautiful and coarsely-brave French creature save the beloved Mayfield unaided, and with the glory thereof unshared?

Never!

She arose silently, and glided after La Travadeuse, who had already slipped down the stairs, and was just in the act of noiselessly passing into Mayfield's room.

But, at this juncture, the Godlove came to another terrified pause.

There was the shrill call of a screaming sort of whistle, and then, with a hoarse, tigerish kind of roar, Therese was seen to spring forward into the moonlighted room.

A shout, a furious oath, then a scuffling, struggling sound; and when Mrs. Godlove reached the threshold at last, a terrible tableau was being enacted before her.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

A TERRIBLE moonlight tableau in the mysterious dead of night, indeed, such as few well-regulated, not to say fashionable, suburban boarding-houses have ever furnished forth an equal.

The mysterious invalid widow from abroad had suddenly been transformed into Joseph Mervyn, the desperate murderer-treasure-thief, caught with uplifted knife over the recumbent form of the unconscious and slumbering Mayfield, but now struggling furiously in the powerful grasp of La Travadeuse, the woman athlete.

The Adonis-like divinity student himself, starting, terror stricken and bewildered, out of his interrupted dreams, and already half-out of bed, but too amazed to more than stupidly gaze for the moment upon the dramatic scene.

Lastly, an answering whistle, accompanied by an encouraging shout from the garden, and then an apparition of Old Falcon, the Thunderbolt Detective, climbing into view through the same window that first gave entrance to Jem Burkitt, the doom-marked fugitive convict, upon the theater of our stirring narrative less than six weeks previous.

"She-wolf! serpent! hell-cat!" snarled the interrupted assassin, struggling like a snared wild beast in the grasp of Therese, and striving in vain to use his knife upon her. "Am I to be cheated out of my final revenge, and into the hangman's clutch, and by a woman, too?"

Therese's sole answer was a terrible laugh.

As well might he struggle against the slowly-tightening and bone-crushing folds of the serpent-monarch of the Amazon primeval woods as escape from those beautifully-rounded yet invincible arms.

"Hang on to him!" shouted Old Falcon, scrambling into the room. "One minute more, brave Therese, and—"

Then the murderer was felled like an ox, snap! click! and he was helpless, dazed on the floor, with the glittering handcuffs on his wrists.

But alas! a last convulsive down-thrust of his cowardly knife had entered the bosom of the brave woman's dressing-gown, and there she was, tottering in the moonlight, with her life-blood oozing out of her noble breast, and lacing the alabaster surface with its crimsoning streaks.

"A flesh-wound—no more!" she murmured, as Mrs. Godlove and other frightened women, including Henriette, with such hastily-snatched

wraps as they had been able to throw around their persons, came crowding, hesitating and bewildered, partly into the room. "A bandage, a mere rag to stanch the bleeding, and—and—"

Fortunately Harvey Mayfield had gone to his rest more than half-dressed—had, in fact, fallen to sleep from the perusal of a book, as the volume itself on the floor, together with a half-burnt-out night-lamp on a table at the head of the bed sufficiently attested.

In an instant he had sprung from the couch and caught the tottering and fainting Therese in his arms.

"Noble woman!" he exclaimed, "you shall not, you must not die! I owe you my life, Therese! Speak! what is there that I can give in return for your devotion?"

She had somewhat rallied, and was stanching the gush of blood from the wound with a handkerchief that had just been handed her by Retta, who was also assisting in supporting her.

"You ask me what you can give me, *cheri*," murmured Therese, looking fondly up into his face, with a white smile. "Alas! only that which I would have of you is no longer yours to give—your heart. It belongs to her who should also have your hand. Here—here, *chers amis, mes enfants!*" she struggled erect once more and placed the young man's and the young woman's hands in each other. "Look up-stairs. I have also saved your fortune to you, *belle petite*. All there, *all!* the stuffed portmanteaus—the cash—the rich treasure! You will enjoy it, *mes enfants*, enjoy it, and be happy in your loves, though—though sometimes you will find leisure from your happiness to murmur *pauvre Therese! pauvre Therese!*"

Then she fainted in earnest.

The detective, being something of a surgeon, among his many other accomplishments, made a rapid examination of Therese's wound, as she sunk into Retta's arms.

"It is, truly, a mere flesh wound, though a somewhat deep one," he said, peremptorily. "Carry her to her room, you ladies, and do what you can toward stanching the blood-flow, while a practitioner is being sent for. Begone now, all of you! The morning breaks, the romance of the tableau is at an end, and the hard, matter-of-fact hand of the law is in possession."

This served to clear the room of the spectators, and Therese was carried away.

"Just as soon as you can dress yourself, young man," continued the detective, addressing Mayfield, who was already completing his toilette, "run off and notify the authorities. Meantime, I'll look after our prisoner here, and now that he is secure, I doubt not but the cash-treasure up-stairs can take care of itself, for a short time at least. No; on second thoughts, you had better bring the portmanteaus down here. Better to have them, no less than this precious scoundrel, under my eye while *you* are absent."

"But, what does it all mean?" cried Mayfield. "I confess to being still half-bewildered. How did this murderous wretch chance into my room here? Through that same window by which you entered?"

"Fiddle-strings! Don't you tumble to the fellow's racket even yet?"

"No."

"Why, he was the mysterious invalid widow from abroad—last night's new arrival, you know. A deuced clever dodge to escape suspicion, too, if I hadn't chanced to see through it from the start!"

"What! you suspected the subterfuge, even from the first?"

"Certainly."

"Why didn't you break up the rascal's plot on the spot?"

"Because I wanted to give Therese a chance at your gratitude."

"Oh, I begin to understand!"

"Young man, heroes in petticoats are not common nowadays. Therese Bertrande may be something of a whirlwind among the conventionalities of social life, but no better, nobler heart ever beat underneath a bodice."

"I absolutely agree with you, sir," replied the young man with grave simplicity. "But, tell me: how could this consummate villain have managed such a plot, and we so hard upon his heels?"

"Because he is consummate, I fancy. The loan of a feminine costume and two or three Saratoga trunks on the part of some of his Inwood associates—unprincipled profligates and gamblers, doubtless, like himself—at the opportune moment would have effected the trick. *Hallo!*"

Here Joseph, who had been lying on the floor, apparently in a stunned and dazed condition, rose into a sitting posture, and, stretching out his manacled wrists, looked up at the two men with an evil smile.

"I would have had you both dead to rights, if the luck had only run better," he said, with cool self-possession. "But don't be too sure of the game yet. The rope isn't woven that will hang me."

"Don't be too sure of that, you unconscionable hound!" exclaimed the detective, fairly spurning him with his foot. "Hurry up, May-

field! Bring down the cash, and then fetch the officers without delay. I sha'n't rest till I have this murderous prodigy in White Plains jail under my personal supervision."

This was accordingly done.

In less than an hour's time Joseph Mervyn was behind the bars; and within three hours after that the recovered treasure, together with funds restored to it by the action of Harvey Mayfield, was safely banked to Henriette Mervyn's credit in the sterling metropolitan institutions.

Then Henrietta was introduced by the detective to a capable lawyer as her legal representative in straightening out the complicated affair; the newspaper reporters were given access to the treasure sensation *in toto*, with full details from beginning to end; and the public were bidden to the exciting feast.

CHAPTER XLVI.

CONCLUSION.

"MR. MAYFIELD, I would respectfully request a few words with you."

The words were Mrs. Godlove's, and they were spoken shortly after breakfast following upon the arrest of Joseph Mervyn, to Harvey Mayfield as he was chatting animatedly with a group of the lady boarders, including not only Miss Mervyn but also Therese Bertrande, whom prompt surgical attendance, combined with her peerless constitutional vigor, had enabled to already make light of her wound.

"Certainly, ma'm." And the young man moved politely toward the reception-room door which the good lady was suggestively holding half-open.

"Mais, arretez, je vous prie, belle madame!" interrupted Therese, also stepping forward, and dragging Henriette along with her. "Surely we should take part in the consultation proposed, since I am quite sure it concerns the three of us no less than one."

Mrs. Godlove frowned, but the four were by this time in the parlor, and Therese made haste to close the door.

"What need of so much ceremony, dear Madame Godlove," she went on, airily, "when it is so easy to divine what you would say to *cher Harvee*—what really concerns us all."

"Are you sure, then, that you know what I was going to say?" demanded the landlady, who was unwontedly collected and stern.

"Perfectly, *chere madame*."

"What was it on my mind to say?"

"The last night's, or rather this early morning's, sensation, following so soon upon the convict's sanguinary death under Mr. Mayfield's chamber window, is, so to speak, the last feather on the camel's back of long-suffering propriety and conventionality, as represented by the *Maison Godlove* at large."

"You have divined aright, with your usual perspicacity, Madame Bertrande," acknowledged Mrs. Godlove, firmly. "That is about the substance of what I would have said, though perhaps in other words. And yet," with a somewhat obsequious glance at Miss Mervyn, "and yet—"

"Oh, don't soften the blow, *chere madame*! Goodness knows, no well-regulated boarding-house could have staggered under what yours has sustained, and then come out smiling. After to-day, you will be no longer troubled with my condescension, for one, and I shall only ask you to keep La Sauterelle over night."

"Thanks!" said Mrs. Godlove, stiffly; "but you should have permitted me to finish my say. I was going to add that a young lady of Miss Mervyn's wealth and position," with another obsequious smile for Henriette, "could always be at liberty to command my house, my services and my accommodations at her pleasure."

La Travadeuse burst into her really ringing and delicious laugh.

"Do let me answer for you, *belle petite*!" she entreated, with a sign to Retta, who had been on the point of replying. "And do not blush because of my surprising *cher Mayfield* and you in your garden *tete-a-tete* of a short time ago, and in which I doubt not everything was made serene and lovely between your two foolish hearts. Dear Madame Godlove, Miss Mervyn, or I mistake not, will scarcely make any serious change in her living affairs until after her nuptials with our dear friend in common, Mr. Harvey Mayfield, formerly of grave leanings toward divinity and sacred learning."

Henriette, who was blushing like a peony, tried to put her hand over the speaker's laughing mouth, but Mayfield drew her back, and then, with the young girl upon his arm, made a smiling bow to the other ladies.

Mrs. Godlove had doubtless before this resigned herself to the inevitable, though she was now very pale, if composed.

However, she was sensible enough to make the best of it.

"It seems just as it should be," she said, forcing a smile. "I hope none of you feel unnecessarily hurried from what I have said, but will continue," with a bow to Mayfield and Therese, "to regard my house your home, as heretofore—at your convenience."

"Mon Dieu! how sweetly we arrange ourselves!" cried Therese, producing a little package

of tickets. "Look you, friends: I arranged matters with my manager yesterday, and have promised him a superb performance of my cannon feat at the circus to-night, to make up for my recent disappointments of the public. And I want you all to be present. Accept of these complimentaries, and then swear that you will come. It may be my farewell of you all. What do you say?"

Henriette and Mayfield smilingly accepted the tickets offered them, and promised to attend. but Mrs. Godlove drew back.

However, La Travadeuse had not yet got through with astonishing the latter.

She threw her arm round her neck, kissed her heartily, patted her cheek, and then pressed the complimentary into her hand.

"Do promise, *belle madame*!" she whispered. "Major Falconbridge, the great detective, is also to be present, at my invitation, and I know he is just dying to have you go under his escort."

With that she darted out of the room, in answer to a call from Mignon, and was hardly seen again throughout the day.

At the great circus show of the ensuing night, it was the general impression that the popular and versatile Travadeuse was fairly surpassing herself.

Never before had she appeared to such striking and picturesque advantage.

She skipped along the chalked tight-rope, her magnificently proportioned figure agleam with the gold and silver tinsel of her art, with the easy grace of a robin skipping along a fence-rail.

She flashed through the aerial flights of the flying trapeze like the voluptuous and winged creature of a dream.

The multitude of spectators fairly roared their enthusiasm.

At last, however, the suspenseful hush fell upon them, as was invariably the case when she stepped forward to be fired out of the mammoth cannon, or howitzer, in that dangerous and sweeping flight far into the skyey regions of the lofty show-building—there to catch upon a dangling cross-bar, nearly a hundred feet above the people's heads, and gracefully kiss her hand in acknowledgment of the surging plaudits rising to her from far below—which had earned for her the sometime sobriquet of The Human Cannon Ball.

She slipped three fourths of her glittering length into the gun, kissed her hand over the metallic muzzle-rim as a sign that she was in readiness, bang! went the charge of powder behind the spring mechanism beneath her feet, and then there was, not the customary roar of applause, but a stormy and horrified groan.

Through some oversight (or, as some afterward declared, through a suicidal foresight of her own,) the powder-charge behind the spring had been more than doubled!

Instead of soaring on high, as was ordinarily the case, in obedience to the mechanism, she fairly shot into the peak of the house, and an instant later lay on the sawdust of the arena, hopelessly crushed and mangled beyond recovery.

Among those who gathered about her deathbed, in the green room, a few minutes later, in obedience to a peremptory summons into the private boxes not far away, were two gentlemen and two ladies.

Needless to say that they were Mayfield and Old Falcon, respectively escorting Henrietta Mervyn and Mrs. Godlove.

Therese was fast dying, but a smile illuminated her pallid face as her fading eyes rested upon the younger couple.

She made a feeble movement, and they bended over her, restraining their agitation as best they might.

"*Chers amis*, you will be happy together," she whispered, just audibly, and no more. "Ah! my little girl, my Grasshopper, my Mignon?"

"She shall henceforth be *our charge*," Mayfield made haste to say. "Make yourself easy as to Mignon, Therese, dear Therese!"

"Yes," sobbed Retta. "The little girl shall be as my own—my younger sister—from this time on!"

A look of content came into the poor, dying face.

"Kiss me, *cheri*!" came from the quivering lips.

Mayfield bent yet lower, and their lips met.

"Ah, *cheri*, is it not as I promised?" she murmured yet again. "Perhaps I was never worthy the love of a good man, *cher ami*; but, if I could not have you to myself, I could yet leave you to one far better, far purer than I, and then—die!"

He bent yet lower, and there was a loud sob from Retta, but there was only clay to mourn over now—Therese Bertrande, otherwise The Whirlwind, nee Peggy Burkitt, the diamond waif of the London slums, had stepped off into the arena of the Infinite.

Harvey Mayfield and Henriette Mervyn were married one month later on, and thus the romance of the Fateful Legacy had a practical though felicitous outcome at last.

Joseph Mervyn found a means to commit suicide in his prison-cell shortly before the day set for his trial.

THE END.

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